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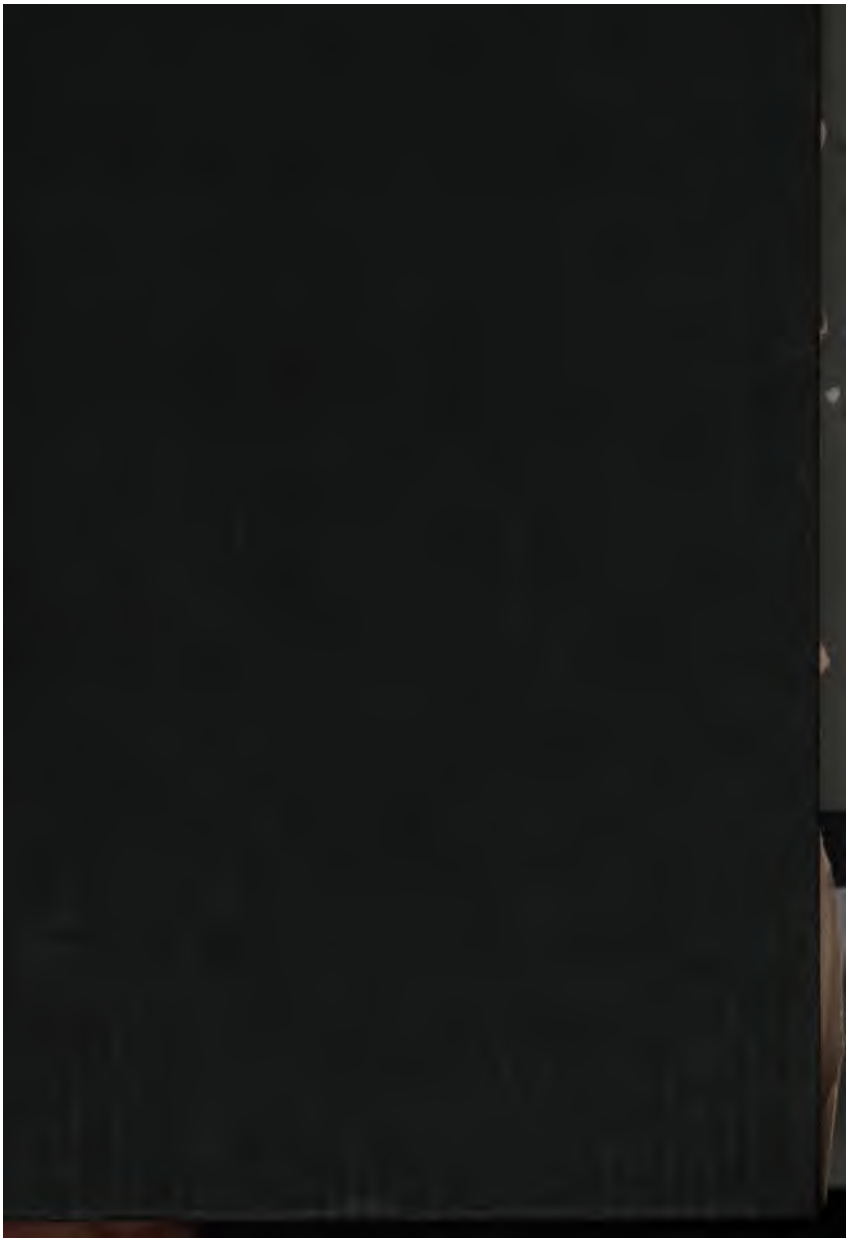

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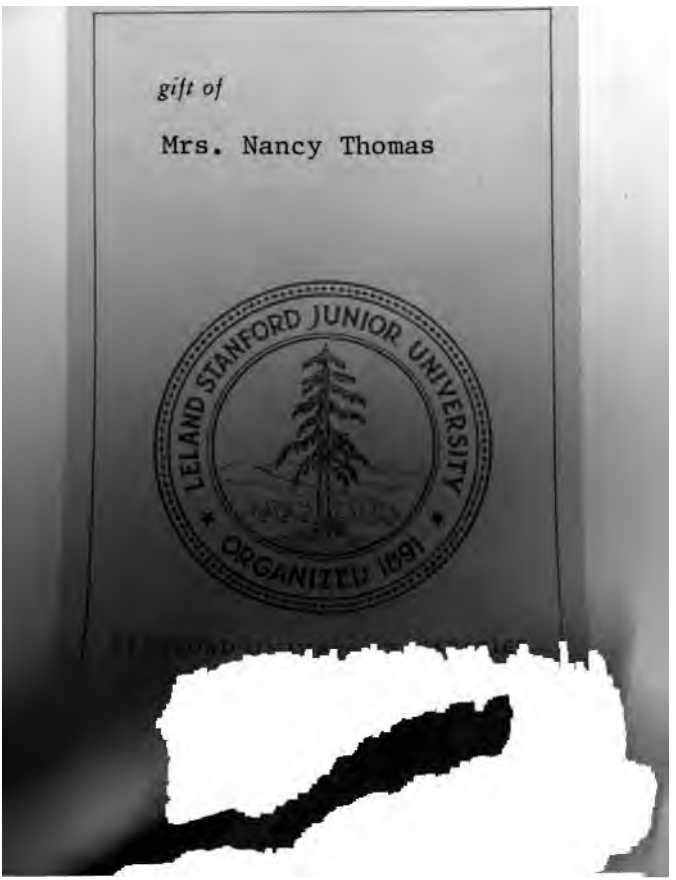
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CHARLES DICKENS

THE MAN AND HIS WORK

X

THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF DAVID COPPERFIELD

"THE Personal History of David Copperfield" was issued in monthly numbers, beginning in May, 1849, and extending to November, 1850. The circulation averaged about twenty-five thousand copies a month. After it was completed, it attained a popularity unexampled among Dickens's novels, with the single exception of "Pickwick," — that gentleman, and his friends and associates, maintaining a steady preëminence of popularity over all the succeeding characters that Dickens created. To the present moment, "The Pickwick Papers" is the most salable of all the author's books.

Every great dramatist and novelist has been more or less troubled in the selection of a title for his play or romance. Generally the name

of one character, whether leading or misleading, has at last been adopted as on the whole the best. Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear; Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, Amelia; Tristram Shandy; Waverley, Guy Mannering, Ivanhoe, Redgauntlet, Quentin Durward; Faust and Wilhelm Meister; Pendennis, The Newcomes, Henry Esmond, Philip; Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, David Copperfield, Little Dorrit, — all these are so familiarized to us by the merit of the works associated with their titles, that we hardly recognize the difficulty that torments most writers in giving to a play, a poem, or a novel, a title which shall attract public curiosity, and shall at the same time be not untrue to the intention of the work. As Dickens published his works serially and wished to stimulate public attention by the titles as well as by the matter of his narratives, it is curious that he should so often have fallen back on the old fashion of calling a book by the name of the charac-

ter whose fortunes are most particularly portrayed in it.

In the case of "David Copperfield," he went through his usual controversies with his friend Forster as to the proper title of what is now generally considered his best book. At first, it was to be called "Mag's Diversions, being the Personal History of Mr. Thomas Mag the Younger, of Blunderstone House"; then the adventures of "Mr. David Mag, the Younger, of Copperfield House"; then, "Mr. David Copperfield the Younger and his Great-Aunt Margaret." When Forster pointed out to him that the initials of David Copperfield were those of his own name reversed, he was surprised, and asked, "Why should I so obstinately have kept to that name when once it turned up?" After fixing on "David Copperfield," there followed six variations on the title, neither of which was ultimately chosen. At last the present title was selected. As the narrative was intended to be in the form of autobiography, it would seem there should

have been little difficulty in hitting on the proper title; but in this, as in other instances of a similar kind, Dickens did not seem fully to appreciate the fact that success almost wholly depends, not on the name of the book, but on the name of the author of the book.

Forster thinks that the happiest period of his friend's life was that in which he was engaged in the composition of this work. It will be observed that the pathos of the book is not only singularly touching, but that it has in it more of the spirit of meditation than the pathos of his previous novels. As the hero relates his own story, many years after most of the events in it occurred, the sorrows he describes are transfigured, as thus recalled by the memory of imagination and reason, as well as by the memory of the heart; and they all combine to produce one beautiful effect of mingled sensibility and thoughtfulness. In all the greatest poets and romancers of the world, it is noticeable that the most perfect and permanent expressions of emotion are those in

which emotion is, as we may say, intellectualized. The heart is intercepted by the brain before it succeeds in its instinctive rush to the lips; and the result is that the heart utters itself in apt words and images which abide forever as adequate expressions of the fierce or tender passions it experiences. Tennyson would be suggested to the minds of most readers as confirming the truth of this process of impassioned genius, while Byron would be considered as an exception to it; yet the greatest works of Byron, the last two cantos of "Childe Harold," for instance, and the serious passages of "Don Juan," are all enveloped in an atmosphere of thoughtfulness, of intense meditation.

But whatever may be objected to the general principle, that emotion is made more efficient by its fusion with intelligence, there can be no doubt that in "David Copperfield," — especially in the first fourteen chapters of the book devoted to the early years of the hero, — the sorrows of the bright and sensitive boy,

as viewed through the medium of imaginative memory, are made more deeply pathetic, and unseal the fountain of tears by more subtle touches of emotional genius, than if they had been described from that immediateness of impression which the spectacle of misery makes on the heart, and in describing which Dickens had shown himself, time after time, an expert of the first order. One wonders how a book, published in numbers, obtained from the first such a great popular circulation, when so large a portion of the first five numbers was devoted to a curious psychological analysis of the feelings of an immature boy, as remembered by a man who had outgrown them, — the lonely and inexperienced boy still being, in the most intense meaning of Wordsworth's phrase, "the father of the man."

The attentive reader of the book must be struck by the author's constant tendency to arrest the current of his autobiographical narrative for the purpose of presenting and explaining his exact thoughts and emotions at the

time when each incident of the story occurred. This tendency is most obvious in the first quarter of the book, which ends in placing David under the protection of his formidable aunt, Miss Betsey Trotwood; but it reappears on every occasion, whether artistically justifiable or unjustifiable, as the story proceeds to its *dénouement*. The underlying purpose is to exhibit the spiritual growth of a man of genius, and the name of that genius is Charles Dickens. The biographical element is prominent in the boy David Copperfield; and it is not altogether abandoned, to those who can read between the lines, in the man David Copperfield. Fact and fiction are so interwoven in the texture of the story that it requires some skill to distinguish the exact points where personal experiences end and imaginative experiences begin; but that a strong autobiographical element permeates the whole narrative, it is impossible to doubt. What Dickens actually achieved in practical life is blended with what he wished to achieve in the sphere of the

affections; and the story becomes the more spiritually true in those very portions where the circumstances and events are most remote from the actual incidents of his life. Indeed there never was such a curious psychological autobiography as this of David Copperfield, — the author passing from facts to fancies, from experiences to aspirations and ideals, in the easiest and most natural fashion, and ending with the declaration that he was supremely satisfied with the way things had ultimately "turned up" and turned out.

As to the facts blended with the fictitious narrative, the reader has only to substitute bottles of wines and spirits for blacking-bottles in order to identify the little David Copperfield's connection with the wine-house of Mr. Quinion, and the connection of little Charles Dickens with the blacking establishment of Lamert & Co.

It may be said that Dickens was made a drudge in Mr. Lamert's warehouse by a command which was born of the united wisdom

of Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Nickleby, — that is, of his father and mother; and Mrs. Nickleby was the last to be convinced that the business relations thus formed should not be continued. It was not until after his death that this incident in his boyish career was revealed to the world. He never thoroughly forgave his mother for opposing his withdrawal from an occupation which to him appeared ignominious, — an occupation which he could never think of afterwards without tremors and shudders of humiliation and shame. His father, having quarreled with the Lamerts, declared that Charles should be taken from the establishment; and Dickens adds, in his letter to Forster, detailing all the woeful circumstances of his boyish serfdom: "I do not write resentfully or angrily; for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am; but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back."

In the first of these Introductions, that on "The Pickwick Papers," the duties of little Charles, then at the age of ten, were described. There was nothing in them really humiliating to a boy whose father was both in debt and in the Marshalsea prison, and whose mother, like Mrs. Micawber, had vainly attempted to recover the fortunes of the family, by having a large brass plate on the door of her house, announcing *Mrs. Dickens's Establishment* for the education of children of both sexes. Indeed Charles, then a sickly lad, hoped that he, too, might receive an education with the other pupils who were expected to throng to such a seminary of learning. "I left," he says, "at a great many other doors, a great many circulars calling attention to the merits of the establishment. Yet nobody ever came to school, nor do I recollect that anybody ever proposed to come, or that the least preparation was made to receive anybody. But I know we got on very badly with the butcher and the baker; that very often we had

not too much for dinner; and that at last my father was arrested."

The family, indeed, were in a ruined condition. Mr. Dickens was in the Marshalsea, whither his wife, failing in attracting pupils to her educational establishment in Gower Street, soon, from motives of economy, followed him, with what Dickens calls her "encampment" of children. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that it should have been thought a happy circumstance that Charles was in a position where he might earn six or seven shillings a week, and be enabled to board with Mrs. Pipchin instead of adding one more to the population of the Marshalsea. It was a cruel experience for a sensitive boy of genius, with an appetite almost ravenous for intellectual food; but there was nothing dishonorable in the occupation, and most lads of ten would have been contented with it. Still it is piteous to read the account of "the secret agony of soul" with which he endured his enforced companionship with

vulgar companions, — feeling, as he did, his soul die out of him day after day, — whether we read it in the romance of "David Copperfield," or as it is stated in his autobiographic communication to Forster.

The two boys who worked with him in covering the pots of paste-blacking were named Bob Fagin and Paul Green. "Bob Fagin," says Dickens, "was an orphan, and lived with his brother-in-law, a waterman. Poll Green's father had the additional distinction of being a fireman, and was employed at the Drury Lane theatre; where another relation of Poll's, I think his little sister, did imps in the pantomimes."

Mrs. Pipchin, or rather the original of that wonderful woman portrayed in "Dombey and Son," was "an old lady in reduced circumstances, who took children in to board" in Little College Street, Camden Town. "She had," Dickens told Forster, "a little brother and sister under her care then; somebody's natural children, who were very irregularly

paid for; and a widow's little son. The two boys and I slept in the same room. My own exclusive breakfast, of a penny cottage-loaf and a pennyworth of milk, I provided for myself. I kept another small loaf, and a quarter of a pound of cheese, on a particular shelf of a particular cupboard, to make my supper on when I came back at night. They made a hole in the six or seven shillings, I know well; and I was out at the blacking-warehouse all day, and had to support myself upon that money all the week. I suppose my lodging was paid for by my father. I certainly did not pay for it myself; and I certainly had no other assistance whatever (the making of my clothes, I think, excepted), from Monday morning until Saturday night. No advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no support from any one I can call to mind, so help me God."

On Sundays, he conducted his sister Fanny, who was a pupil in the Royal Academy of Music, to the Marshalsea, and passed the day

in prison, with his parents and brothers and sisters.

There is something quaint as well as sad in the spectacle of his lonely life, as presented in the fragment of autobiography he confided to Forster. There is little in it, however, which he has not worked into the romance of David Copperfield, almost word for word. The notion that he was a gentleman's son, and the fear he felt that he might become "a little robber or little vagabond," — his instinctive avoidance of the company of bad boys, shunning acquaintances of his own age lest they should lead him into bad ways, — and his shrewd perception of everything and everybody that came within the range of his childish experience, whether in the blacking-warehouse where he toiled, or in the Marshalsea prison where his natural protectors were "encamped," — all these, or the spirit of all these, are expressed in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth chapters of "David Copperfield." What he feared was that his squalid surroundings would induce in

him a corresponding squalor of soul. His parents, under the circumstances, could hardly be blamed for the lowness of his employment, except so far as their improvidence had deprived them of the means of sending him to school, instead of putting him into a warehouse. The trouble was that they had to do with a child who was not merely one of a million, but one of a thousand millions, — with one of those exceptional geniuses which commonplace fathers and mothers may well be pardoned for not recognizing, and therefore not foreseeing the fame of their gifted progeny. In the case of Dickens, it is difficult to conceive how any position in English public or commercial life could have satisfied him much more than that which he early occupied in the manufacture and distribution of blacking.

After David Copperfield has been taken away from Mr. Quinion and been educated, after he has been placed in Mr. Spenlow's office, for the purpose of qualifying himself to be a

proctor in Doctors' Commons, he rapidly comes to the conclusion that a proctor's business is to earn a good living by a process of genteel swindling, under the forms of law. In other books, Dickens has labored to show that government, as carried on in Great Britain, is but a high-complicated process of genteel sham and swindling. Now if Murdstone had succeeded in making David Copperfield a Lord of any department of the Circumlocution Office, had he succeeded even in making him Lord Chancellor, he would still have made him only a genteel, a star-and-gartered, robber of the public. If the same Mr. Murdstone had set his heart on educating David for a high position among the business men of the country, the result might have been in producing only a Gradgrind or Bounderby.

If we should take Dickens's delicious satire on English political, legal, and commercial life as solid truth, we must bless the moral intention of Mr. Murdstone, when he devoted David Copperfield to an honest though hum-

ble mode of gaining his livelihood, rather than to risk the precious youth in that struggle for the prizes of English ambition, which Dickens, in other books, has been careful to show are commonly won by inefficient mediocrity, thoroughly schooled in the art of "How Not to Do It," and drawing their preposterously large salaries out of a plundered public. It seems, however, that it is gentlemanly to be a proctor, a lawyer, a member of Parliament, a great merchant, a Lord Chancellor, though all these modes of activity are hopelessly submerged in sham and humbug; but that an unappreciated lad of ten years old should have been subjected, for a year, to an innocent, laudable, and honest employment of sealing blacking-bottles is something to be carefully concealed from wife and children, as a thing accursed. This sensitiveness was unworthy of such a broad-natured man as Dickens.[1]

[1] [Mr. Whipple draws his inferences very plainly from Dickens's letters to his friend Forster and from Forster's narrative of the whole matter in his Life. It is due to the son of Dickens, Mr. Charles Dickens, to

Among the characters in "David Copperfield" drawn from life, it has been supposed that Dickens's dear friend, Talfourd, stood for the portrait of Traddles. There may have been some external peculiarities in which they agreed, but there is no resemblance in the minds of the two. Traddles is represented as saying that he was entirely destitute of imagination; and Talfourd, who wrote so much

repeat what he has written on this subject: "In one passage, my father says: 'I have never, until I now impart it to this paper, in any burst of confidence with any one, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God'; but I have my mother's authority for saying — she told me at the time of the publication of Mr. Forster's first volume, and asked me to make the fact public if, after her death, an opportunity should arise — that the story was eventually read to her in strict confidence by my father, who at the same time intimated his intention of publishing it by and by as a portion of his autobiography. From this purpose she endeavoured to dissuade him: on the ground that he had spoken with undue harshness of his father, and, especially, of his mother: and with so much success that he eventually decided that he would be satisfied with working it into *David Copperfield*, and would give up the idea of putting it as it stood."]

on the subject of imagination, and who exercised the faculty so often in speech as well as in writing, could never have said that. As a scholar, critic, and poet, as a lawyer, legislator, and judge, he appears to have had nothing in common with Traddles except goodness of heart.

Miss Mowcher was copied from an actual person; and was recognized by the original, through the too accurate description of her physical defects and deformities. She naturally complained of the outrage as cruel; and Dickens was pained at the pain he had heedlessly given. He wrote to her, substantially, "that he was grieved and surprised beyond measure; that he had not intended her altogether; that all his characters, being made up out of many people, were composite, and never individual; that the chair (for table) and other matters were undoubtedly from her, but that other traits were not hers at all; that in Miss Mowcher's 'Ain't I volatile,' his friends had quite correctly recognized the

favorite utterance of a different person; that he felt nevertheless he had done wrong, and would now do anything to repair it." Accordingly the plan of the story, as far as she was concerned with it, was changed. The original intention probably was to make her one of the conscious agents in the seduction of Emily; but that idea was abandoned, and the wrong done to her in the twenty-second chapter was somewhat clumsily repaired in chapter thirty-two, and in chapter sixty-one.

In Mr. Micawber, the author had his father, John Dickens, constantly in mind, in respect both to Mr. Micawber's impecuniosity and to his rotundity of speech. Mr. Micawber's celebrated remark to David Copperfield, as to the proper relation between income and expenditure, was almost word for word that which John Dickens delivered to little Charles, when the latter, crying bitterly, visited him in the debtor's prison. "He told me," writes Dickens to Forster, "to take warning by the Marshalsea and to observe that if a man had

twenty pounds a year, and spent nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, he would be happy; but that a shilling spent the other way would make him wretched."

The Captain Hopkins of the novel was an actual Captain Porter, who had the room over John Dickens's; and Charles was actually sent up with the message to Captain Porter, "with Mr. Dickens's compliments, that I was his son, and could he, Captain P., lend me a knife and fork." John Dickens also drew up a petition before he left the prison, not, like that of Mr. Micawber, for the abolition of imprisonment for debt, "but for the less dignified but more accessible boon of a bounty to the prisoners to drink his Majesty's health on his Majesty's forthcoming birthday." Captain Porter read the petition to the prisoners who were to sign it, under the same circumstances, and with the same results, which attended the reading of Mr. Micawber's composition by the Captain Hopkins of the novel. "I remember a certain luscious roll," says

Dickens, "which he gave to such words as 'Majesty — gracious Majesty — your gracious Majesty's unfortunate subjects — your Majesty's well-known munificence,' — as if the words were something real in his mouth, and delicious to taste; my poor father meanwhile listening with a little of an author's vanity, and contemplating (not severely) the spikes on the opposite wall."

Of John Dickens's *Micawberish* ponderosity and magniloquence of phrase, Mr. Forster quotes a number of examples. Thus he talked of the necessity of visiting Paris "in order to consolidate Augustus's French." Of one of his connections he wrote: "I must express my tendency to believe that his longevity is (to say the least of it) extremely problematical." He likes the Isle of Man, "because he finds there troops of friends, and every description of continental luxury at a cheap rate." But the best of all his deliverances was his answer to somebody who urged, with much heat, the spiritual superiorities of Nonconformists over

Church of England people. "The Supreme Being," replied Mr. John solemnly, "must be an entirely different individual from what I have every reason to believe him to be, if he would care in the least for the society of your relations." It is to be added that Dickens never lost his affection for his father, in spite of his many foibles. "The longer I live, the better man I think him," was his ultimate judgment; and that is substantially the reader's judgment of Mr. Micawber.

John Dickens died on March 31, 1851. The stone which the son placed over the father's grave bore testimony to his "zealous, useful, cheerful spirit."

And what a superb set the whole Micawber family is! Mr. Wilkins Micawber, Mrs. Micawber, Wilkins Micawber, Jr., and the twins! When the boy David became a boarder in their house, the servant of the family was "a dark complexioned young woman, with a habit of snorting," who informed him that she was an "orfling" from St. Luke's work-

house, near by. Mrs. Micawber was in every way worthy of being the wife of a husband who was ever desirous of establishing lucrative business connections, but, always thwarted by fate, was ever making his way through a howling crowd of enraged creditors.

"My mamma," so Mrs. Micawber told little David, "departed this life before Mr. Micawber's difficulties commenced, or at least before they became pressing. My papa lived to bail Mr. Micawber several times, and then expired, regretted by a numerous circle." Mrs. M., while expressing her determination on every occasion never to desert Mr. M., and regretting the prejudices that her family had imbibed against him, owing to the circumstance that the accommodation bills they had indorsed were never taken up at maturity, still always referred to her family as a genteel social connection, which it would never do for her or her husband to give up, merely because its members had refused, with certain blasphemous and needless additions to the terms of

their refusal, to do anything more to aid Mr. M., whether he dealt in corn, or wine, or beer, or coals, or any other form of merchandise known to the business of Great Britain.

When the Micawbers have finally decided to depart for Australia, Mrs. Micawber, who is the sagacious and forecasting thinker of the family, believes that the time has come for Mr. M. to be reconciled to her genteel relations. "Now," she confidentially says to the group of her new friends, "I may be wrong in my conclusions; it is very likely I am; but my individual impression is, that the gulf between my family and Mr. Micawber may be traced to an apprehension, on the part of my family, that Mr. Micawber would require pecuniary accommodation. I cannot help thinking," said Mrs. Micawber, with an air of deep sagacity, "that there are members of my family who have been apprehensive that Mr. Micawber would solicit them for their names, —I do not mean to be conferred in Baptism upon our children, but to be inscribed on Bills

of Exchange, and negotiated in the Money Market." Then pausing, as overcome by the remote inferences which this action of her penetrating intellect had revealed, she goes on to declare that the occasion calls for a festive meeting between Mr. M. and her family, in which Mr. M. might have an opportunity of "developing his views."

"My dear," answers Mr. Micawber, heated probably by various liquids as well as by acrimonious memories, "it may be better for me to state distinctly, at once, that if I were to develop my views to that assembled group, they would possibly be found of an offensive nature; my impression being that your family are, in the aggregate, impertinent snobs; and, in detail, unmitigated Ruffians."

Mrs. M. objects to this expression of rage, that her family has never understood him, and that he has never understood them; in the former case, that is of their misunderstanding of him, she sincerely pities their misfortune.

Mr. Micawber relents at this, but concludes

with the remark: "All I would say is, that I can go abroad without your family coming forward to favor me, in short, with a parting shove of their cold shoulders; and that, upon the whole, I would rather leave England with such impetus as I possess than derive any acceleration of it from that quarter."

But the wonder of this Micawber family is that they continue, year after year, increasing in number, always contriving to have moderately good things to eat and hot things to drink, always passing from debt to bankruptcy, and from bankruptcy to new debts, and yet never altogether losing their moral sense. In "Vanity Fair," Thackeray represents Becky Sharp and her accomplished husband, Colonel Crawley, as engaged in a conspiracy to swindle landlords, butchers, bakers, milliners, dressmakers, — everybody, in short, who has the least part in providing them with the means of living luxuriously; but they solve the problem of living on nothing at all by a shrewdly prepared cynical scheme of cheating

all those persons who furnish them with lodgings, furniture, food, and raiment. Mr. Micawber, on the contrary, slides into debt with a certain indolent, grandiose dignity; his imagination so glorifies his future that he eats veal cutlets and drinks rum punch with a constant sense that something will "turn up" to enable him to pay for the same; and he never can see, in his moments of exaltation, that a bill at thirty, or sixty, or ninety days, will not pay any honest debt, and he never can see, after he has dropped from his ideal height of expectation, any method of defraying his debt except by suicide.

The swift alternations from delight to despair, in which, it is needless to say, the wife of his bosom sympathizes, are really untainted by any elaborated purpose of swindling those who trust him. After Micawber's first bankruptcy, the revengeful bootmaker, who had previously daily shocked poor little David Copperfield by crying through the passage of the house all kinds of disrespectful imputa-

tions on the honor of Mr. Micawber, "declared, in open court, that he bore him no malice, but that when money was owing to him he liked to be paid. He thought," he added, probably for the information of the court, "that it was human nature."

In other embarrassments, especially that particular one where Mr. Micawber darkly hints that, if the worst comes to the worst, "no man is without a friend who is possessed of shaving materials," it is edifying to notice the agonized rush of his wife into his arms, horrified at the suggestion of a razor cutting the endeared throat which it was innocently designed only to shave. The rapidity with which the couple pass from gloom and heroics to punch, and from punch to gloom and heroics again, puzzles the friends who are less experienced than they in the contradictory emotions springing from a constant entanglement in the meshes of ever-increasing debt.

If Dickens teaches anything in his books, it is the sacred importance of defraying minor

debts of housekeeping. Never defraud the milkman, the butcher, the baker, the washerwoman, the collector of the Queen's taxes,—anybody who represents the duty of controlling expenditure so that it shall not outrun income; but still he contrives to make us tolerant of Mr. Micawber, who gayly and magniloquently violates these most essential of moral and economic maxims, through a constant expectation that his great talents will be eventually recognized. Mrs. Micawber informs Copperfield and Traddles that here is her husband, a man of genius, "without any suitable position or employment. Where," she exclaims, "does the responsibility rest, under such circumstances? Clearly," she adds, "on society. Then I would make a fact so disgraceful known, and boldly challenge society to set it right. It appears to me that what Mr. Micawber is to do is to throw down the gauntlet to society, and say, in effect, 'Show me who will take that up. Let the party immediately step forward.'"

She meant by this flourish a resort to advertising in the newspaper. The result was to place Mr. Micawber in the service of Wickfield and Heep, and thus to affect the fortunes of prominent personages in the story.

Uriah Heep, "the umble," who in this way becomes Mr. Micawber's employer, is one of the most vividly conceived and most elaborately developed of Dickens's villains, and he is perhaps the most offensive of them all. He winds his foul way through the story like a poisonous snake, and the more perfectly he is represented, the more of an artistic nuisance he becomes. There is no character in the novel more intensely realized. Everything about him: the shambling figure, the curious writhings of his person in his expression of mock humility, his long hands slowly twining over one another, the twinkling of his dinted nostrils, the damp, fishy fingers which chilled the heart of everybody who shook hands with him, "the shadowless eyes without the ghost of an eyelash," — all these peculiarities are obtruded

on the reader only to excite mere disgust and abhorrence; the red-headed, leaden-faced human baboon is felt to be an outcast even from that tolerant artistic world which is ready to admit a Caliban; and the animal craft with which he carries out his schemes of avarice, malice, and revenge, is felt to belong to that low class of scoundrels who have no right to enter into even the scoundrelly domain of romance. The villain of Bulwer-Lytton, even the villain of Mr. G. P. R. James, is, with all his deficiencies, a more acceptable villain to the artistic conscience than Uriah Heep, though the latter is realized with an intensity of imagination altogether beyond the powers of Bulwer-Lytton or Mr. James.

Still it may be added that Uriah Heep should be tolerated, were it only for the glorious scene in which Mr. Micawber exposes his rascalities. The fifty-second chapter of the book, where this exposure occurs, is a masterpiece of humor. The oratorical stand taken by Mr. Micawber in his revelations; the snarl-

ing interruptions of the detected rogue; the cry of Mrs. Heep as each damning circumstance is stated, "Ury, Ury, be umble and make terms"; the cool good sense of Traddles; the rush of Betsey Trotwood to Heep, seizing him by the collar, and demanding her property back, as if the "forger and cheat" had concealed it in his neckerchief, — all these combine to produce a comic effect which is incomparably good. Mr. Micawber is the leading personage in this inimitable scene; and there is a kind of dramatic justice in the annihilation of the dirty, crawling rogue, who, for years, had been craftily feeling his way to his object, by an impecunious, needy, scatterbrained, gentlemanly vagabond, whom the sly rogue had counted upon as his purchased instrument. Mr. Micawber has afterwards a few more opportunities to display his qualities in a characteristic fashion; but the reader feels that his genius culminated in his detection and denunciation of Heep.

As a novel in which the hero is himself the

narrator, "The Personal History of David Copperfield" ranks high. There is, properly speaking, little plot; but things occur in a way to keep the reader surprised and pleased to the last, and the variety of characters is such as to compensate for any slowness of movement in the story. A slight review of the scenes and incidents of the novel will call back to many readers the delightful sensations they experienced on its first perusal. The birth of David, preceded by the abrupt apparition of aunt Betsey Trotwood, and her no less abrupt departure when she learned that the new-born child was a boy instead of a girl; the affection of Peggotty, the servant and nurse of his mother, for her and for him, and his growth, under their tender care, up to the time he became jealous of the handsome gentleman in black whiskers, called Mr. Murdstone, who eventually succeeded in winning the heart, hand, and moderate fortune of his weak, vain, and affectionate mother, are all detailed with the distinctness of the memory of childhood, and

with the magical charm with which imagination invests memory.

As a posthumous child, born six months after his father's death, little David's first childish association was with the white gravestone in the church-yard over the mound of earth where his father was buried, and with the undefinable compassion he felt for it, "lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlor was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were — almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes — bolted and locked against it." The dead father, thus locked out, is succeeded by the father-in-law, who is Davy's evil genius. In fact, his mother was a kind of widowed Dora Spenlow, and the disease of an "undisciplined heart" came to him by inheritance, as other distinguished Englishmen inherit the gout.

The marriage of his mother with Mr. Murdstone is the occasion of his transfer, under Peggotty's care, to her relations in Yarmouth, where her brother and his nephew

Ham, with Mrs. Gummidge as housekeeper, live in a kind of superannuated boat or barge, high and dry on the beach. There have been few palaces described by fashionable novelists which attract the reader so much as this "boat-house," — clean, warm, snug, cosy, with Mr. Peggotty as the lord of the mansion; more fascinating than Lansdowne House, or Devonshire House, or Holland House, in the kind of satisfaction it gives to that healthy sense of life, which delights beyond all things in meeting human nature in examples of primal innocence, simplicity, rude strength, and instinctive goodness. Transferred to Mr. Creakle's school, established for the purpose of brutally flagellating boys into a knowledge of the rudiments of classical learning, he meets with Steerforth and Traddles; but before much knowledge is either drilled or whipped into him, he is called home by the death of his mother.

Who that has read it can forget the account of that death-scene as told by his dear

old nurse, Peggotty? "It was pretty far in the night," said Peggotty, "when she asked me for some drink; and when she had taken it, gave me such a patient smile, the dear! — so beautiful! — . . . 'Peggotty, my dear,' she said then, 'put me nearer to you,' for she was very weak. 'Lay your good arm underneath my neck,' she said, 'and turn me to you, *for your face is going far off, and I want it to be near.*' I put it as she asked; and oh, Davy! the time had come when my first parting words to you were true — when she was glad to lay her poor head on her stupid cross old Peggotty's arm — and she died like a child that had gone to sleep!" The pathos of this is so deep, that the most hardened critic cannot quote it without feeling the tears gather in his eyes, and drop on the page as he writes.

And then follows the short visit of little Davy, under the care of Peggotty, to the boat-house of Mr. Peggotty, — "the idea," he says, "of being again surrounded by those honest faces, shining welcome on me," giving

a glad impetus to his desire of leaving the murderous Murdstones for that happy mansion on the Yarmouth sands. Mr. Barkis, who had formerly told him that "Barkis is willin'," drives them to the blessed abode, courting Peggotty, during the journey, in such a manner as to endanger Davy's little frame, by too much squeezing of it into the left-hand corner of the cart where he sat. After Yarmouth is reached, Barkis shakes hands with David, and assures him: "It 's all right; I 'm a friend of yourn. You made it all right first."

So deep was his gratitude to Davy, that after his death, there was discovered among his effects, "an imitation lemon, full of minute cups and saucers," which Mr. Barkis had evidently bought as a present to Davy, but which his singular covetousness prevented him from parting with after he had invested money in it. This is one of the finest strokes of Dickens's humor. Peggotty consults with Davy as to the propriety of marrying Barkis. He decides that it would be a very good

thing; "For then you know," he sagely observes, "you would always have the horse and cart to bring you over to see me, and could come for nothing, and be sure of coming." Peggotty is much impressed by "the sense of the dear!" and marries Barkis, "a good plain creetur," on the ground that she may be then in an independent condition and thus may assist her darling Davy.

The scenes which succeed in the boat-house are delicious. Davy's first determination was confirmed, to marry Little Em'ly, and go away "anywhere, to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand and hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead!" Under this hallucination, Little Em'ly's blue eyes looked still bluer and her dimpled face looked brighter, and "her own self prettier and gayer."

From this dream of childish happiness the boy is rudely awakened by his return to his father-in-law, and by his being placed in the wine store of Mr. Quinion. Here he boards with Mr. Micawber; and thence, after much suffering, he succeeds in escaping to his aunt Betsey Trotwood, — an energetic, crotchety, self-reliant woman, with a sound, warm heart, more or less concealed by her belligerent demeanor and manners. After his aunt has routed the Murdstones, horse and foot, — or rather donkey and foot, — from her domain, David is sent to Dr. Strong's school at Canterbury, where he lives with Mr. Wickfield, and is adopted by his good angel Agnes Wickfield, as her brother. Were it not for the obtrusion of the morally and physically abominable Uriah Heep, the chapters which refer to his life in Canterbury might rank with the most charming of prose idyls. His boyish loves and boyish fights are depicted with inimitable humor.

After completing his education at Dr.

Strong's, he sets out on a short excursion; is compelled to feel himself "dreadfully young" by the way he is treated by coachman and waiters; meets his old friend Steerforth, who forthwith gives him the name of Daisy, and takes that too fascinating friend with him on a visit to the boat-house on the Yarmouth sands. They arrive at the moment when Em'ly's engagement to the poor, rough, inexpressive, noble-hearted Ham has been announced, and are witnesses of Mr. Peggotty's joy at the auspicious event. "I don't know," Mr. Peggotty tells them, "how long I may live, or how soon I may die; but I know that if I was capsized, any night, in a gale of wind in Yarmouth Roads here, *and was to see the town lights shining for the last time over the rollers as I could n't make no head against*, I could go down quieter for thinking, 'There's a man ashore, iron-true to my little Em'ly, God bless her, and no wrong can touch my little Em'ly while so be as that man lives!'"

It would seem as if it were not in human

nature to resist such an appeal to the heart as that; yet Steerforth, after making himself universally agreeable to the company present, even cheering up Mrs. Gummidge herself, tells David that Ham "is rather a chuckle-headed fellow for the girl," and has already formed, or half formed, the project of seducing her. The tragedy occurs after David has been entered in the office of Spenlow and Jorkins, to learn the processes by which he may become a proctor in Doctors' Commons; after the first sight of Dora Spenlow has made him madly in love with her; after he has become a lodger in Mrs. Crupp's house; after he has made that dinner in honor of Steerforth and his friends, in which he became hopelessly intoxicated, and was exhibited thus to Agnes in the London theatre, where she occupied a box with her town friends; and after he has again visited Steerforth in his mother's house, just before the seducer of Emily has concluded to hazard everything rather than be balked of his prize. David, still believing in

him, as fascinating seducers of the Steerforth type are always believed in, watches him as he sleeps, "lying, easily, with his head upon his arm," as he had seen him often lie at school. In this "silent hour," he left him. And then comes that burst of feeling, which Dickens himself was so fond of quoting to friends: "Never more, oh, God forgive you, Steerforth! to touch that placid hand in love and friendship. Never, never more!" The depth of meaning in that pathetic farewell to the person who appeared to poor David as the realization of the ideal of manhood, — of that wail over a dead friend, a friend morally dead, is one of the most touching and subtle strokes of Dickens's pathos.

The flight of Emily brings out the character of Mr. Peggotty in all its noble qualities of disinterested, all-sacrificing affection. This rude fisherman, in his patient wanderings in search of his lost niece, is made morally sublime. How his purpose lends beauty to his rough features, and irradiates his uncouth

speech! Simplicity, dignity, religious seriousness of devotion to his end, and utter unconsciousness of anything heroic or out of the way in his self-imposed pilgrimage, — these are his qualities; and he stands preëminent among Dickens's humble personages, as a sturdy Christian hero, led by a trust in Providence through the weary course of his journeyings, and humbly accepting obstructions to his success only as stimulants to his constant, never-doubting search.

And then the horror he expresses to David, that the money of the seducer he had received from Emily, should ever be supposed to have been spent by himself! "All that troubles me is," he says, "to think that any harm might come to me, afore that money was give back. If I was to die, and it was lost, or stole, or elseways made away with, and it was never know'd by him but what I 'd took it, *I believe the t 'other wureld would n't hold me! I believe I must come back!*"

On the eve of the discovering of his niece,

David, who was to be his companion in following some clue to her whereabouts, saw, as they prepared to go out together, "how carefully he adjusted the little room, put a candle ready and the means of lighting it, arranged the bed, and finally took out of a drawer one of her dresses (I remember to have seen her wear it), neatly folded with some other garments, and a bonnet, which he placed upon a chair. He made no allusion to these clothes, neither did I. There they had been waiting for her, many and many a night, no doubt."

If this little description is not an example of that vital pathos which goes down to the very root of the thing in human hearts, where shall we find it?

The scene in the fiftieth chapter, where, after Emily has been utterly crushed by the sarcasms and denunciations of Rosa Dartle, Mr. Peggotty appears, is a scene on which the critic can only record his judgment by his tears. She only utters the word, "Uncle!" A fearful cry followed the word. "I paused a moment,"

says the narrator, "and looking in, saw him supporting her insensible figure in his arms. He gazed for a few seconds in her face; then stooped to kiss it — oh, how tenderly! — and drew a handkerchief before it. 'Mas'r Davy,' he said, in a low tremulous voice, when it was covered, 'I thank my Heav'nly Father as my dream's come true! I thank Him hearty for having guided of me, in His own ways, to my darling!' With these words he took her up in his arms, and, with the veiled face lying on his bosom, and addressed towards his own, carried her, motionless and unconscious, down the stairs."

Meanwhile, David Copperfield, though obscurely conscious that Agnes is the proper person whom he should select as the companion of his life, falls madly in love with Dora Spenlow. The many scenes in which this "comic love," as Dickens calls it in one of his letters, is recorded and finally rewarded, are so joyous, vivid, and delicious, that it is not to be wondered at that Dickens felt, at last, a reluct-

ance to permit his little heroine to die. He intended Agnes to be David's second wife; but his conception of Agnes was vague as compared with the intensity of imagination with which he realized to himself the character of Dora. A child, born to him during the progress of the narrative, was named Dora. It was only with a wrench of the heart, with a moral and physical pang, that he reluctantly resolved that the child-wife should die by his hand, or rather by his pen. "Still undecided," he writes to Forster, "about Dora, but MUST decide to-day" (May 7, 1850). What the decision was, the reader knows.

Her namesake, Dora Dickens, was born on the 16th of August of the same year. On the 14th of April, 1851, whilst Dickens was delivering a speech at the Theatrical Fund Dinner, and emphasizing the cruel fact that actors have often to come "from scenes of sickness, of suffering, aye, even of death itself, to play their parts before us," his friend John Forster had in his hand the intelligence of the death

of the poor infant, Dora Dickens. He concluded to inform the father of his bereavement, only after that father had sat down, with the shouts of applause from the delighted auditors of his pathetic eloquence still ringing in his ears. In the story, nothing can excel in humor the incidents connected with the housekeeping of David's child-wife, or the pathos of the account of her sickness and death.

In a work so rich in description and characterization, it is difficult to say which scene or event is the most powerful; but probably the reader's judgment would agree with the author's, in singling out the fifty-fifth chapter as the greatest in the book. This is the chapter in which Dickens describes the tempest at Yarmouth — the wreck of the ship — and Ham's desperate but fruitless effort to save the one surviving passenger. Who that has read it can forget the catastrophe? A "high, green, vast hillside of water," just as Ham has neared the wreck, overwhelms him, and he is drawn ashore dead. The man he had sacrificed his

life in the vain attempt to rescue, was Steerforth, the enemy whose conduct had made life worthless to him; and the dead body of Steerforth is quickly after cast by the enraged sea on the beach, amid the ruins of the home he has wasted, and by the side of the man whose heart he has broken, the one as unconscious of what he has failed to reach as the other of what he has perished to save.

Dickens wrote this description in the condition of a man magically possessed by his subject. "I have been," he writes to Forster on September 15, 1850, "tremendously at work these two days; eight hours at a stretch yesterday, and six hours and a half to-day, with the Ham and Steerforth chapter, which has completely knocked me over — utterly defeated me!"

Of most of the other characters in "David Copperfield," it may be said that they are depicted from "within outwards," even when they are marked by some distinctive outward trait or phrase. About the time that he was

engaged on the novel, he wrote to Forster short criticism on the work of a writer wh was then engaging the attention of the publi "The story," he says, "is extremely good in deed; but all the strongest things of which it i capable, missed. It shows just how far tha kind of power can go. It is more like a not of the idea than anything else. It seems to m as if it were written by somebody who live next door to the people, *rather than inside o 'em.*" Dickens lived so completely "inside of his creations, that to part with his charac ters was as if he were bidding farewell to inti mate friends. As he was writing the last pa of "David Copperfield," he said to Forster "I am within three pages of the shore; an am strangely divided, as usual in such case between sorrow and joy. Oh, my dear Fors ter, if I were to say half of what Copperfiel makes me feel to-night, how strangely, even t you, I should be turned inside out! *I seem to be sending some part of myself into th Shadowy World.*"

In this statement we recognize a truth, too much overlooked, that such complete absorption in beings of the imagination, is a terrible drain on the very substance, — on the reserved force of the mind. Hundreds of novelists tell their stories without much exhaustion of body or soul; but to Dickens the writing of a romance was a very serious affair, involving an expenditure of physical and mental vitality, of which fluent narrators of pleasing tales, superficial both in incident and character, have no conception.

The compensation is that one of Dickens's romances outvalues a hundred of theirs, and that he is the more appreciated and enjoyed the more he is *re*read. The advantage which the man of genius thus obtains is shown in the permanency of his works, outliving, as they do, all books which make no call on the interior sources and springs of spiritual life. Mr. G. P. R. James wrote romances, which could hardly be comprised in a hundred volumes, as originally published; but "David

Copperfield" is not only more than worth them all, but it survives; while hardly one of Mr. James's romances, however popular at the time it was published, is remembered by a reader of the present generation.

XI

BLEAK HOUSE

THIS novel was begun towards the end of November, 1851, and was completed at Boulogne, in August, 1853. It was published in twenty numbers, the first appearing in March, 1852, and the last, a double number, in September, 1853. Its circulation was from thirty to forty thousand copies a month. There was, as usual with Dickens, a prolonged hesitation as to the proper title to be selected for the story. Eleven titles were proposed before "Bleak House" was finally determined upon. The rejected names were: 1. Tom-all-Alone's. The Ruined House. 2. Tom-all-Alone's. The Solitary House, that was always shut up. 3. Bleak House Academy. 4. The East Wind. 5. Tom-all-Alone's. The Ruined [House, Building, Factory, Mill], that got into Chancery and never got out. 6. Tom-all-Alone's.

The Solitary House, where the grass grew. 7. Tom-all-Alone's. The Solitary House, that was always shut up and never lighted. 8. Tom-all-Alone's. The Ruined Mill, that got into Chancery, and never got out. 9. Tom-all-Alone's. The Solitary House where the Wind howled. 10. Tom-all-Alone's. The Ruined House that got into Chancery and never got out. 11. Bleak House and the East Wind. How they both got into Chancery and never got out.

The constant appearance of "Tom-all-Alone's" in these varying titles was owing to the author's original purpose of making poor Jo more prominent in the story than was afterwards thought desirable. The name was taken from "the tumbling tenements in Chancery, where Jo finds his wretched habitation." It would seem as if a more appropriate title for the romance would have been "John Jarndyce," or "Esther Summerson," or "Jarndyce and Jarndyce." As, however, the pleasing associations of the reader of a book gather around

its name, however inexpressive it may be, the somewhat blank title of "Bleak House" may be considered as good as any other; for the throng of interesting incidents and striking characters, which are connected with the name, cannot now be transferred to any other. Still, as the work is generally admitted to be, in point of construction, the best of Dickens's romances, and as the plot turns on the question whether Lady Dedlock had a lover, who was a husband in everything but the name, before she had a legal husband, it would seem as if some title which half revealed, half obscured the leading fact and event of the story, would have been better than the unsuggestive one of "Bleak House." It would not, of course, be wise to call it "Dedlock and Daughter," after having christened a previous novel "Dombey and Son"; but it is curious that neither Dickens nor Forster could hit upon any name which implied a relation between guilty mother and illegitimate child, without, at the same time, disclosing the secret of the plot in advance.

The Chancery suit, in which so many of the characters are formally engaged, is not so much the real centre of the novel, as the equivocal position of Lady Dedlock, — the mother of Esther Summerson, the childless wife of Sir Leicester Dedlock, and the victim of Mr. Tulkinghorn's persistent inquiries into her antecedents. The boy vagabond Jo, the Snagsbys, Krook, Mr. Guppy, Mr. Jobling, the Smallweeds, Mr. George and the Bagnets, Hortense the maid, and Mr. Bucket the detective, Mrs. Rouncewell, Rosa, not to mention others who occupy a prominent position in the narrative, are more intimately connected with the discovery of Lady Dedlock's guilt, than with the suit in Chancery which is more or less interwoven with it.

In writing the novel, Dickens was more than ever involved in those mental perplexities which, whenever he began an extended work, pressed heavily upon him, — perplexities springing from provoking ebbs of his genius after its seemingly constant flow. Fertility

of creativeness was suddenly stopped by strange moods in which his mind became comparatively sterile, and hours of productive effort were followed by days of vacant idleness. From his correspondence at this time, we note that he flies from one place to another, seeking some spot where his genius may revisit him, and not compel him "to grind sparks out of his dull blade." Whithersoever he goes, he still finds himself surrounded by scenes of cheer or gloom, which alike distract him from an all-absorbing interest in the creations of his mind. While writing "Bleak House" he was editing "Household Words," and contributing to it "A Child's History of England." He was at the same time overwhelmed with all kinds of calls upon his attention, — social, political, and benevolent. His large family also was increased by the birth of his last child, named, after his distinguished godfather, Edward Bulwer-Lytton Dickens. In the midst of all this confusion he wrote "Bleak House." The unity of the romance is the more remarkable,

pany of assailants when he not only brought Leigh Hunt into "Bleak House," but represented him as doing dishonorable actions for small sums of money. Hunt was the last of the readers of the book to understand that he was meant in Dickens's delineation of Skimpole, for he was properly unconscious of resemblance to that personage in anything except in preaching a similar gospel of amiability and cheer, in a similar proclivity to subsist on the contributions of friends, and in a similar habit of borrowing money which he could not repay.

At the time the satire was written, Hunt was the charming companion of authors who cheerfully and genially lent the odd pounds or shillings of which he happened to be in need, and who never dreamed of the possibility that the borrower would ever be in a position to reimburse them for their little advances. It is said that Carlyle, our modern Diogenes, always had on the shelf of his library a bright piece of gold, which he was

wont to call "Leigh Hunt's guinea," — expecting that at any moment it might be demanded by its owner. It is needless to add that the expectation was not disappointed, and that the yellow symbol of chops and claret had to be frequently replaced.

Dickens doubtless contributed more than Carlyle, or Talfourd, or Procter, or Forster, although less than Shelley, to relieve Hunt's ever-recurring necessities. But so keen an observer as he could not fail to notice certain offensive peculiarities of this aged literary Micawber, whose gospel of cheerfulness and amiability did not recognize the austere obligations of creditor and debtor, and who jauntily exacted tribute from brethren of the pen more fortunate than himself without any sense of humiliation. But he overlooked Hunt's services both to liberty and literature. Hunt indeed had made himself a privileged person among Dickens's contemporaries, not only as a poet, and as a charming interpretative critic of authors as wide apart as Spenser and Crabbe,

never have committed Richard, for a similar sum, into the hands of Mr. Vholes, and never have described Mr. Jarndyce, who had overwhelmed him with benefits, as "the Incarnation of Selfishness."

Dickens really meant Haydon, the painter, in the darker shades of Mr. Skimpole's portrait; but still there was a certain connection, in the logic of character, between the child-like way in which Mr. Leigh Hunt Skimpole cast aside, in his pleasant talk with friends, all considerations of money, and the somewhat impish way in which Mr. Harold Skimpole slipped gracefully into the vices of selfishness, treachery, and ingratitude. Dickens felt that he had done wrong; all the pleasure which his readers derived from Skimpole was turned into pain for him; and his apologies and protestations to Hunt were little more than evasions of the real injury he had done to his impecunious friend. The plain fact was, that Hunt and Skimpole were identified in the public mind. It was therefore cruel to make

Skimpole do things mean and base which Hunt was incapable of doing.[1]

[1] Dickens was so much on the defensive in this matter that when *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* appeared, edited by his son, Dickens called attention to it in *All the Year Round* (December 24, 1859) in an article entitled *Leigh Hunt: A Remonstrance.* After a brief running comment on the book, with extracts from it, he closes his article with these words: —

"Four or five years ago, the writer of these lines was much pained by accidentally encountering a printed statement, 'that Mr. Leigh Hunt was the original of Harold Skimpole in "Bleak House."' The writer of these lines is the author of that book. The statement came from America. It is no disrespect to that country, in which the writer has, perhaps, as many friends and as true an interest as any man that lives, good-humoredly to state the fact, that he has, now and then, been the subject of paragraphs in transatlantic papers, more surprisingly destitute of all foundation in truth than the wildest delusions of the wildest lunatics. For reasons born of this experience, he let the thing go by.

"But, since Mr. Leigh Hunt's death, the statement has been revived in England. The delicacy and generosity evinced in its revival are for the rather late consideration of its revivers. The fact is this: —

"Exactly those graces and charms of manner which are remembered in the words we have quoted, were remembered by the author of the work of fiction in question, when he drew the character in question.

But, dismissing all considerations relating to the propriety of the questionable personal-

Above all other things, that 'sort of gay and ostentatious wilfulness' in the humoring of a subject, which had many a time delighted him, and impressed him as being unspeakably whimsical and attractive, was the airy quality he wanted for the man he invented. Partly for this reason, and partly (he has since often grieved to think) for the pleasure it afforded him to find that delightful manner reproducing itself under his hand, he yielded to the temptation of too often making the character *speak* like his old friend. He had no more thought, God forgive him! that the admired original would ever be charged with the imaginary vices of the fictitious creature, than he has himself ever thought of charging the blood of Desdemona and Othello on the innocent Academy model who sat for Iago's leg in the picture. Even as to the mere occasional manner, he meant to be so cautious and conscientious, that he privately referred the proof sheets of the first number of that book to two intimate literary friends of Leigh Hunt (both still living), and altered the whole of that part of the text on their discovering too strong a resemblance to his 'way.'

"He cannot see the son lay this wreath on the father's tomb, and leave him to the possibility of ever thinking that the present words might have righted the father's memory and were left unwritten. He cannot know that his own son may have to explain his father when folly or malice can wound his heart no more, and leave this task undone."

ities intermixed with the general characterization of "Bleak House," no reader can fail to be impressed with the elastic, confident vigor of mind which marks the conception and execution of the novel. The atmosphere of retrospective meditation, dreamy and imaginative, which envelops "David Copperfield," disappears altogether in this succeeding work; and the author returns to the clear, sharp, bright, "forgetive" mood of mind in which he created the throng of characters which diversify the romance of "Dombey and Son." Power is visible everywhere in the story, power in constructing the plot, power in conceiving and representing the characters, power in the terse, crisp, compact sentences, crowded with verbal felicities, which make up the general impression we have of its style.

There is, as usual, more or less "padding." Mr. George and the Bagnets, excellent as they are, occupy too many pages; the Snagsbys, and Guster their servant, are wire-drawn; and there are some descriptive passages that might have

been spared without loss to the general effect; but at least three quarters, perhaps five sixths, of the novel, are singularly vigorous and effective.

As to the plot of "Bleak House," it indicates, relatively speaking, the essential clumsiness of English genius in the construction of what the German critics call "a whole," that is, a plan in which all the parts are strictly subordinate to the main design and purpose of the story, so that there is nothing, in incident or character, so prominent as to interfere with the supreme artistic satisfaction derived from a perception of the poem, or drama, or romance, considered as an organic product in which the parts are "mutually ends and means." It is easy to say that no such poem, or drama, or romance exists; but still there are works of genius which approximate, more or less, to the realization of such an idea of artistic perfection. It will, however, commonly be found that, in works of genius, the *plan* comes from the understanding; the separate

parts from the sentiments, the imagination, and the individuality of the author; and, at least in English literature, just in proportion as the vital creative powers of the writer find free expression, will he be likely to subordinate the plan he has mechanically arranged to the parts in which his genius finds vital expression.

If there ever was a poem written on a definite plan, — or a design clearly thought out beforehand, — it was the "Faerie Queene." Spenser labors, in his prose introduction to the poem, to show reasons for his beautiful unreasonableness. Everything, in the end, was to come out in perfect accordance with a prearranged purpose. Prince Arthur was to appear in the twelfth book, as the sum and substance of all chivalric and Christian virtues, and connect all the parts of the poem by the laws of imaginative logic. The "Faerie Queene" remains a fragment; but the reader of the first three books soon forgets the main design in admiration of the particular parts, — each part being a poem in itself, and each

part containing stanzas which, in a poetic sense, outvalue the logical conception of "the whole." In the conception of his main design, Spenser was an artisan; in the execution of its particular parts he was an artist.

We bring forward this shining instance, because an accomplished German critic of universal literature once attempted to prove to the present editor that Bulwer-Lytton's feeble poem of "King Arthur" was the best English poem of the nineteenth century, owing to the fact that it was perfect in plan. The purely mechanical perfection of the construction had blinded this professor of æsthetics to the fact that the author was not a poet. The thing was constructed according to the rules. The rules demanded that all the parts should tend to a general unity of impression. "King Arthur," like the masterpieces of Shakespeare, obeyed the rules. It was useless to thunder down upon him fragments of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, and a score of minor poets. All of the single lines or para-

graphs we quoted contained more thought, imagination, and passion than Bulwer-Lytton was capable of feeling and conceiving. The height of the genius was conceded; but still to him genius was of small account, if it were fragmentary, and did not combine its parts to produce "a whole." By this style of argumentation, an accomplished mechanical versifier, like Bulwer-Lytton, was logically elevated to the throne of poetic art.

The criticism, though foolish, was significant, inasmuch as it indicated the defect of such grand poems as the "Faerie Queene," the "Paradise Lost," and the "Excursion," while it did not touch the essential genius of Spenser, Milton, and Wordsworth. If we admit that there is more or less of anarchy in these poems, we easily account for it on the ground that, while the general conception of these poems was mechanical, the general action of the minds of the authors was vital; and the confusion that is observable in the general plan is more than compensated for in the perfection of the

individual details. Out of Shakespeare, any attempt to vindicate English literature for its perfection of organic form, is love's labor lost. The strength of its position is in the invulnerability of special forts, not in the combination of particular defences to defend a threatened line.

Dickens illustrates in "Bleak House" this tendency of English genius, — binding itself to a general plan, mechanically constructed, and unconsciously abandoning the plan in its devotion to characters and incidents vitally conceived. Dickens, as the thoughtful reader will see, is careful to indicate every step in the plot of "Bleak House"; and yet he palpably dazzles away attention from his plot by the vividness of his characterizations. It is plain, when we re-read the novel, that the vulgar, internally combustible Krook has the true will which must settle the case of Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce, if it be ever made known; it is also plain that he has the bundle of letters which Lady Dedlock has addressed to Captain Hawdon,

and which Mr. Tulkinghorn vainly endeavors to obtain. Mr. George and the Bagnets occupy a considerable portion of the story; but they are introduced merely that Mr. George may testify to the fact that the handwriting of "Nemo" is that of Captain Hawdon; and the Chadbands, the Smallweeds, Mr. Guppy, Mr. Snagsby, and the boy Jo, are brought into the book, merely to complete the chain of circumstantial evidence against Lady Dedlock.

The more we study the slight indications of the central purpose of the novelist, scattered over sixty chapters, the more we are impressed with his skill in making seemingly diverse and unconnected characters contribute to the general result. On reflection, we find that the merely mechanical construction of the plot is perfect; but, in reading the story for the first time, we are so carried away by the power displayed in the particular parts, and the value of the characters for the purpose for which they are introduced is so small in comparison with our enjoyment of them as separate realities,

that we are careless of the main design of the book. In other novels Dickens had relied, like Smollett, on the interest which would naturally be excited by a seemingly inexhaustible stream of novel incidents and original characters. In "Bleak House" there was the same succession of characters and incidents combined into an apparent whole; but it was the *succession*, rather than the *combination*, which gave the book its popularity — for the part which the characters had in aiding on the plot was ludicrously disproportioned to their value as satirical, humorous, or pathetic impersonations of types of human life.

In other words, the seeming perfection of "Bleak House" as an artistically constructed story is an illusion. The ordinary reader cares little for the mechanical ingenuity evidenced in the combination of the incidents and characters. What really interests him is what interests him in "Nickleby," "Dombey," and "Copperfield," namely, the fertility of the writer in creating new men and women, who

appear to be more true to life than his own friends and neighbors. It would be easy to point to novels of Mr. G. P. R. James, or Lord Lytton, which are at least equal to "Bleak House" in the mere construction of an interesting and congruous story; but, somehow or other, their characters do not abide in the memory; even the names of the lords, ladies, and common people slip out of our imaginative recollections; but who ever forgot Jarndyce, Esther Summerson, Mrs. Jellyby, Mr. Guppy, Mr. Turveydrop, Jo, Miss Flite, — even Guster?

The leading character of the book is Esther Summerson. It is, doubtless, an artistic defect that her influence on the other characters should be stated in an exclusively autobiographical form; for her instinctive, intrinsic, and unconscious goodness is thus made to appear more or less self-conscious and self-*flattering*. It had been better if Dickens could have consented to adopt the plan of his friend and brother romancer, Wilkie Collins, and varied her

narrative with others written by Jarndyce, Miss Jellyby, Allan Woodcourt, and others, with whom she comes in contact or collision. In this way he would have escaped the fundamental objection to Esther's autobiography that she has to state the effects produced by the action of her bountiful, affectionate, and helpful nature; and that these effects, however modestly disclaimed or innocently wondered at, can only be announced by a recourse to what may be called the artifices of simplicity and innocence. Forster gloomily admits that the attempt was "a difficult enterprise, full of hazard in any case, not worth success, and certainly not successful."

In spite, however, of this criticism, Esther remains in the reader's memory as one of Dickens's most charming delineations of feminine excellence. She is a domestic angel; unfortunately unreal, as life ordinarily goes on, yet still only an ideal embodiment and combination of qualities which, in their separate exercise, are constantly observed to lend beauty

and sweetness to numerous homes. In all her relations with the various characters of the book, she is felt as a vital force, because the reality of goodness is in her, and manifests itself, not only in her unwithholding affection for such a beautiful creature as Ada Clare, but in her prudent conduct of Jarndyce's household, in her efficient sympathy for poor Caddy Jellyby, and in her protecting benevolence for such a diseased outcast from all civilization as the boy Jo. Why should she be considered unreal? Certainly all she does has been done before by thousands of women; but then Dickens has associated in her various feminine perfections which are divorced from certain feminine defects. In real life, good women are not apt to be tolerant and just; they are prone to pronounce harsh judgments on persons whose interior characters they imperfectly perceive; but it will be observed that Esther Summerson, though endowed with a shrewd perception of the defects of others, has a pervading sweetness of nature which constantly impels

her to act the part of a kind of domestic providence, and to use and utilize for good her knowledge of folly, vanity, and frailty. It is evident that she takes no pleasure in the thought that she is superior to others, and that there is no taint of self-righteousness in her self-devotion. Indeed, her conclusion from all the experiences of her life is this: "My lot has been so blest that I can relate little of myself which is not a story of goodness and generosity in others."

Next to Esther, the most lovable character in the novel is John Jarndyce, her guardian and protector. Jarndyce is a man of sound and strong mind, who squanders money on persons and schemes he secretly distrusts, through the sensitive benevolence of his heart; and who, when the futility of his generous acts is brought home to him, excuses his discomposure by pretending that his temper is badly affected whenever the wind is to the eastward. By his beneficence of soul he is attracted to philanthropic enterprises; he aids them mu-

nificently; but his good sense makes him keenly aware of the vanities, pretences, follies, and impostures which are apt to be connected with the plans of professional philanthropists; and his heart is thus in more or less continual conflict with his head. He has not sufficient firmness of character, in meeting the various claims on his purse, to vary his hesitating "yes" with an occasional discriminating "no." Disappointed, however, as he may be in the result of the majority of the appeals made to his benevolence, he is amply rewarded for all failures in the affection and gratitude of Esther Summerson, — his one triumphant success in what may be termed his speculative philanthropy. Why should he not have married her? If Dickens had intended, from the start, that Allan Woodcourt should be her husband, he ought to have individualized Allan as intensely as he has individualized Jarndyce; whereas the fact is that Allan, in spite of his abstract excellence, is not a concrete character like Jarndyce. This jewel among women is

the prize of a comparative phantom of personality, — a man two or three removes from the reality of an imaginative creation; while Jarndyce is all alive, in soul and body, — is so vividly depicted, indeed, that it is difficult to doubt his actual existence; and the reader, who contemplates a European tour, feels that one of the delights of visiting England would be the opportunity afforded him of calling at Bleak House, and having a social chat with its proprietor.

Whatever may be thought of the justice of the attack on the English Court of Chancery, there can be no doubt as to its popular effectiveness. The individual cases of gross wrong are happily selected, and the vigor of the assault is proportioned to the abuses assailed. But a system is not to be rashly condemned because of its abuses. Dickens never seems to have dreamed of the mischief he might produce by holding up to contempt, scorn, and hatred the majestic edifice of equity jurisprudence. Equity as a sentiment was the impulse

which made him rage against equity as an institution; but in the innumerable complications of practical life, mere sentiment would be incapable of rightly solving one in a thousand cases which come before a court of equity. Dickens never misses an opportunity to sneer at the disposition of Englishmen to despise foreigners; but he made the enormous mistake of decrying in "Bleak House" the one court, in insular England, in which the principles of universal reason and universal justice are applied to particular cases as they arise. The complaint is not that justice is refused but that it is deferred. The reader will note that Dickens, throughout his assault, is for swift injustice rather than for tardy justice. In the particular cases that he cites or imagines, a king of Dahomey, crazy with rum, might, on the whole, be a more merciful judge than Nottingham, or Somers, or Hardwicke, or Eldon, or Brougham, or Lyndhurst, or St. Leonards; but the Court of Chancery was no more established to do away with such particular

examples of the hardships of litigation, than the laws which make the marriage contract more than a partnership dissolvable at pleasure were intended to cover all exceptional cases of the hardships of matrimony.

Dickens declares that "the one great principle of English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle, distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble." How capital this is as satire, and yet how unjust! A strong point is made simply by the process of excluding from consideration the litigiousness of human nature. The reader of "Guy Mannering" will remember Counsellor Pleydell's vain attempt to warn Dandie Dinmont from entering on his projected lawsuit; and there is a permanent

moral in the old story of the client who, getting heated as he details the circumstances of his disagreement with his neighbor, ends by saying to his lawyer, "Do you suppose that I 'm a going to allow *him* to have his way in this matter? No; I 'll see *you* —— first!"

The special wrong done by the long suit of Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce is, that it not only disappoints the hopes but ruins the character of Richard Carstone. It keeps him in a provoking state of expectation, which weakens his will for all the practical work of life. While reading "Bleak House," in which the pernicious consequences of this expectant attitude of the mind are exhibited in a masterly way, we forget that the Court of Chancery is comparatively a slight offender in this respect. Both in England and in the United States a vast amount of energy and capital are expended on industrial enterprises, some of which early turn out badly, as in the case of Mrs. Pipchin's husband's venture in the Peruvian mines, but the majority of which are worse

than any of Lord Eldon's tardy judgments, simply from the fact that they keep families for years in expectation of dividends which are never paid, and thus establish a kind of pauper gentility, starving on prospects of income, and enfeebled in will just in proportion as they are deluded by hope.

It would be a very moderate statement to assert that, within the last fifty years, the productive genius of Great Britain has created wealth more than sufficient to pay its enormous national debt, and that the wealth thus created has been hopelessly sunk in unprofitable investments. In the United States we have now the spectacle of some two thousand millions of dollars invested in "securities," which are continually promising to pay interest on the dollars invested, which are continually tempting tens of thousands of Richard Carstones to avoid professional or mechanical work, and which will continue to exert a baleful influence on individual character, until young men and young women, unfortunately born to the

inheritance of such stocks and bonds, shall begin their career with the feeling that they are to depend on their own exertions for the means of subsistence. The chancery lawyer, Mr. Vholes, who cautiously informs Richard Carstone that the suit of Jarndyce *v.* Jarndyce is, on the whole, advancing to a righteous conclusion, is a type of the placid treasurers and presidents of mining, agricultural, commercial, and railroad companies, who preserve, on the strength of salaries notoriously disproportioned to their abilities, a calm, mysterious sublimity of expression, while comforting inquiring stockholders with the vague assurance that all will be right in the end. The only method of overturning these interested financiers is by some appeal to a court which represents the principles of equity.

Leaving out all consideration of the intellectual defects of "Bleak House," there can be no doubt of the richness of its characterization. The satire on the group of politicians who gather in Sir Leicester Dedlock's man-

sion is only a caricature of what occurs in the "change" of a ministry. The object of Dickens palpably was to express his contempt of all Whig and Conservative combinations. His real belief was, not only that the seemingly governing classes did not really govern, but that the government of Great Britain was a humbug, pure and simple, — a government which ignored the ends of righteous government, and withstood, with all its stupid force, the intelligent operation of the energy and inventiveness of a people which made the Nation respectable to all the ends of the earth.

As far as Dickens is a satirist of Great Britain, in its law and in its government, he ranks high among the satirists of his country. But the ordinary reader of "Bleak House" is specially impressed by the humor and pathos of the general representation. The "young man of the name of Guppy" is a wonderful combination of shark, sentimentalist, and snob. The scenes in which Inspector Bucket appears are incomparably good; and his ride with

Esther Summerson, to save her mother from hopeless misery, may be placed among the most intensely interesting incidents of modern fiction. Poor Jo, who is oddly brought into the main current of the story, remains as an everlasting protest against the shortcomings of modern civilization.[1] On the whole,

[1] An anonymous letter was received by Dickens, in which occurred this passage: "I venture to trespass on your attention with one serious query, touching a sentence in the last number of *Bleak House*. Do the supporters of Christian missions to the heathen really deserve the attack that is conveyed in the sentence about Jo seated in his anguish on the doorstep of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts? The allusion is severe, but is it just? Are such boys as Jo neglected? What are ragged schools, town missions, and many of those societies I regret to see sneered at in the last number of *Household Words?*" To this Dickens replied as follows: —

TAVISTOCK HOUSE, TAVISTOCK SQUARE,
Ninth July, 1852.

SIR, — I have received your letter of yesterday's date, and shall content myself with a brief reply.

There was a long time during which benevolent societies were spending immense sums on missions abroad, when there was no such thing as a ragged school in England, or any kind of associated endeavour to penetrate to those horrible domestic depths in

the novel of "Bleak House" may be considered as the most vigorous satirical protest which Dickens ever made against the social,

which such schools are now to be found, and where they were, to my certain knowledge, neither placed nor discovered by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

If you think the balance between the home mission and the foreign mission justly held, I do not. I abstain from drawing the strange comparison that might be drawn between the sums even now expended in endeavours to remove the darkest ignorance and degradation from our very doors, because I have some respect for mistakes which may be founded in a sincere wish to do good. But I present a general suggestion of the still existing anomaly (in such a paragraph as that which offends you), in the hope of inducing some people to reflect on this matter, and to adjust the balance more correctly. I am decidedly of opinion that the two works, the home and the foreign, are *not* conducted with an equal hand, and the home claim is by far the stronger and the more pressing of the two.

Indeed, I have grave doubts whether a great commercial country, holding communication with all parts of the world, can better christianize the benighted portions of it than by the bestowal of its wealth and energy on the making of good Christians at home, and on the utter removal of neglected and untaught childhood from its streets, before it wanders elsewhere. For, if it steadily persists in this work, working down-

legal, and political constitution of Great Britain, while it also includes some of his finest embodiments of manly and womanly character.

ward to the lowest, the travellers of all grades whom it sends abroad will be good, exemplary, practical missionaries, instead of undoers of what the best professed missionaries can do.

These are my opinions, founded, I believe, on some knowledge of facts and some observation. If I could be scared out of them, let me add in all good humour, by such easily-impressed words as "antichristian" or "irreligious," I should think that I deserved them in their real signification.

I have referred in vain to page 312 of *Household Words* for the sneer to which you call my attention. Nor have I, I assure you, the least idea where else it is to be found. —I am, Sir, your faithful servant.

XII

HARD TIMES

DICKENS established a weekly periodical, called "Household Words," on the 30th of March, 1850. On the 1st of April, 1854, he began in it the publication of the tale of "Hard Times," which was continued in weekly instalments until its completion, in the number for the 12th of August. The circulation of "Household Words" was doubled by the appearance in its pages of this story. When published in a separate form, it was appropriately dedicated to Thomas Carlyle, who was Dickens's master in all matters relating to the "dismal science" of political economy.

During the composition of "Hard Times" the author was evidently in an embittered state of mind in respect to social and political questions. He must have felt that he was, in some degree, warring against the demonstrated laws

of the production and distribution of wealth; yet he also felt that he was putting into prominence some laws of the human heart which he supposed political economists had studiously overlooked or ignored. He wrote to Charles Knight that he had no design to damage the really useful truths of political economy, but that his story was directed against "those who see figures and averages, and nothing else; who would take the average of cold in the Crimea during twelve months as a reason for clothing a soldier in nankeen on a night when he would be frozen to death in fur; and who would comfort the laborer in travelling twelve miles a day to and from his work, by telling him that the average distance of one inhabited place from another, on the whole area of England, is only four miles."

This is, of course, a caricatured statement of what statisticians propose to prove by their "figures and averages." Dickens would have been the first to laugh at such an economist and statistician as Michael Thomas Sadler,

who mixed up figures of arithmetic and figures of rhetoric, tables of population and gushing sentiments, in one odd jumble of doubtful calculations and bombastic declamations; yet Sadler is only an extreme case of an investigator who turns aside from his special work to introduce considerations which, however important in themselves, have nothing to do with the business he has in hand. Dickens's mind was so deficient in the power of generalization, so inapt to recognize the operation of inexorable law, that whatever offended his instinctive benevolent sentiments he was inclined to assail as untrue. Now there is no law the operation of which so frequently shocks our benevolent sentiments as the law of gravitation; yet no philanthropist, however accustomed he may be to subordinate scientific truth to amiable impulses, ever presumes to doubt the certain operation of that law.

The great field for the contest between the head and the heart is the domain of political economy. The demonstrated laws of this science

are often particularly offensive to many good men and good women, who wish well to their fellow-creatures, and who are pained by the obstacles which economic maxims present to their diffusive benevolence. The time will come when it will be as intellectually discreditable for an educated person to engage in a crusade against the established laws of political economy as in a crusade against the established laws of the physical universe; but the fact that men like Carlyle, Ruskin, and Dickens can write economic nonsense, without losing intellectual caste, shows that the science of political economy, before its beneficent truths come to be generally admitted, must go through a long struggle with benevolent sophisms and benevolent passions.

In naming this book Dickens found much difficulty. He sent the following titles to John Forster, as expressive of his general idea: 1. "According to Cocker." 2. "Prove It." 3. "Stubborn Things." 4. "Mr. Gradgrind's Facts." 5. "The Grindstone." 6. "Hard

Times." 7. "Two and Two are Four." 8. "Something Tangible." 9. "Our Hard-Headed Friend." 10. "Rust and Dust." 11. Simple Arithmetic." 12. "A Matter of Calculation." 13. "A Mere Question of Figures." 14. "The Gradgrind Philosphy."

The author was in favor of one of three of these, 6, 13, and 14; Forster was in favor of either 2, 6, or 11. As both agreed on No. 6, that title was chosen. Yet certainly No. 14, "The Gradgrind Philosophy," was best of all, for it best indicated the purpose of the story. "Hard Times" is an extremely vague title, and might apply to almost any story that Dickens or any other novelist has written.

It is curious to note the different opinions of two widely differing men, regarding the story itself. Ruskin says that "the essential value and truth of Dickens's writings have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons, merely because he presents his truth with some color of caricature. Unwisely, because Dickens's caricature though often gross

is never mistaken. Allowing for the manner of his telling them, the things he tells us are always true. I wish that he could think it right to limit his brilliant exaggeration to works written only for public amusement; and when he takes up a subject of high national importance, such as that he handled in 'Hard Times,' that he would use severer and more accurate analysis. The usefulness of that work (to my mind, in several respects, the greatest he has written) is with many persons seriously diminished, because Mr. Bounderby is a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master; and Stephen Blackpool a dramatic perfection instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman. But let us not lose the use of Dickens's wit and insight because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire. He is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially 'Hard Times,' should be studied with great care by persons interested in social questions. They

will find much that is partial, and, because partial, apparently unjust; but if they examine all the evidence on the other side, which Dickens seems to overlook, it will appear, after all the trouble, that his view was the finally right one, grossly and sharply told."

This is the opinion of an eloquent thinker and writer, who is most at variance with the principles which scientific economists consider to be scientifically established. On the opposite extreme, we have the opinion of Macaulay, who records in his private diary, under the date of August 12, 1854, this disparaging criticism: "I read Dickens's 'Hard Times.' One excessively touching, heart-breaking passage, and the rest sullen socialism. The evils he attacks he caricatures grossly and with little humor."

In judging the work neither Ruskin nor Macaulay seems to have made any distinction between Dickens as a creator of character and Dickens as a humorous satirist of what he considered flagrant abuses. As a creator of

character he is always tolerant and many-sided; as a satirist he is always intolerant and one-sided; and the only difference between his satire and that of other satirists consists in the fact that he has a wonderful power of individualizing abuses in persons. Juvenal, Dryden, and Pope, though keen satirists of character, are comparativly ineffective in the art of concealing their didactic purpose under an apparently dramatic form. So strong is Dickens's individualizing faculty, and so weak his faculty of generalization, that, as a satirist, he simply personifies his personal opinions. These opinions are formed by quick-witted impressions intensified by philanthropic emotions; they spring neither from any deep insight of reason nor from any careful processes of reasoning; and they are therefore contemptuously discarded as fallacies by all thinkers on social problems who are devoted to the investigation of social phenomena and the establishment of economic laws; but they are so vividly impersonated, and the classes satirized are so

felicitously hit in some of their external characteristics and weak points, that many readers fail to discover the essential difference between such realities of character as Tony Weller and Mrs. Gamp and such semblances of character as Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby. Whatever Dickens understands he humorously represents; whatever he does not understand he humorously misrepresents; but in either case, whether he conceives or misconceives, he conveys to the general reader an impression that he is as great in those characters in which he personifies his antipathies as in those in which he embodies his sympathies.

The operation of this satirical, as contrasted with dramatic genius, is apparent in almost every person who appears in "Hard Times," except Sleary and his companions of the circus combination. Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby are personified abstractions, after the method of Ben Jonson; but the charge that Macaulay brings against them, that they have little of Dickens's humor, must be received

with qualifications. Mr. Bounderby, for example, as the satirical representative of a class, and not as a person who could have had any real existence, — as a person who gathers into himself all the vices of a horde of English manufacturers without a ray of light being shed into his internal constitution of heart and mind, — is one of the wittiest and most humorous of Dickens's embodied sarcasms. Bounderby becomes a seeming character by being looked at and individualized from the point of view of imaginative antipathy. So surveyed, he seems real to thousands who observe their employers from the outside, and judge of them, not as they are, but as they appear to their embittered minds and hearts.

Still the artistic objection holds good, that when a man resembling Mr. Bounderby is brought into the domain of romance or the drama, the great masters of romance and the drama commonly insist that he shall not only be externally represented but internally known. There is no authorized, no accredited, way of

exhibiting character but this, that the dramatist or novelist shall enter into the soul of the personage represented, shall sympathize with him sufficiently to know him, and shall represent his passions, prejudices, and opinions as springing from some central will and individuality. This sympathy is consistent with the utmost hatred of the person described; but characterization becomes satire the moment that antipathy supersedes insight, and the satirist berates the exterior manifestations of an individuality whose interior life he has not diligently explored and interpreted. Bounderby, therefore, is only a magnificent specimen of what satirical genius can do, when divorced from the dramatist's idea of justice, and the dramatist's perception of those minute peculiarities of intellect, disposition, and feeling which distinguish one "bully of humility" from another.

It is ridiculous to assert, as Ruskin asserts, that "Hard Times" is Dickens's greatest work; for it is *the* one of all his works which

should be distinguished from the others, as specially wanting in that power of real characterization on which his reputation as a vivid delineator of human character and human life depends. The whole effect of the story, though it lacks neither amusing nor pathetic incidents, and though it contains passages of description which rank with his best efforts in combining truth of fact with truth of imagination, is ungenial and unpleasant. Indeed, in this book, he simply intensified popular discontent; he ignored, or he was ignorant of, those laws the violation of which is at the root of popular discontent; and proclaimed, with his favorite ideal workman, Stephen Blackpool, that not only the relation between employers and employed, but the whole constitution of civilized society itself, was a hopeless "muddle," beyond the reach of human intelligence or humane feeling to explain and justify.

It is to be observed here, that all cheering views of the amelioration of the condition of the race come from those hard thinkers

whose benevolent impulses push them to the investigation of natural and economic laws. Starting from the position of sentimental benevolence, and meeting unforeseen intellectual obstacles at every step in his progress, Dickens ends in "a muddle" by the necessity of his method. Had he been intellectually equipped with the knowledge possessed by many men to whom in respect to genius he was immensely superior, he would never have landed in a conclusion so ignominious, and one which the average intellect of well informed persons of the present day contemptuously rejects. If Dickens had contented himself with using his great powers of observation, sympathy, humor, imagination, and characterization in their appropriate fields, his lack of scientific training in the austere domain of social, legal, and political science would have been hardly perceptible; but after his immense popularity was assured by the success of "The Pickwick Papers," he was smitten with the ambition to direct the public opinion of Great Britain by

embodying, in exquisitely satirical caricatures, rash and hasty judgments on the whole government of Great Britain in all its departments: legislative, executive, and judicial. He overlooked uses, in order to fasten on abuses. His power to excite, at his will, laughter, or tears, or indignation, was so great that the victims of his mirthful wrath were not at first disposed to resent his debatable fallacies while enjoying his delicious fun. His invasion of the domain of political science, with the palpable design of substituting benevolent instincts for established laws was carelessly condoned by the statesmen, legists, and economists whom he denounced and amused.

Indeed, the great characteristic of Dickens's early popularity was this, that it was confined to no class, but extended to all classes, rich and poor, noble and plebeian. The queen on the throne read him, and so did Hodge at the plough; and between the sovereign and her poorest subject there was no class which did not sound his praises as a humorist. Still, every

student of the real genius of Dickens must be surprised at the judgment pronounced on his various romances by what may be called the higher, the professional, the educated classes, the classes which, both in England and in the United States, hold positions of trust and honor, and are bound, by the practical necessities of their posts, to be on a level with the advancing intelligence of the age, in legislative, economic, and judicial science. By these persons "The Pickwick Papers" are, as a general thing, preferred to any other of the works of Dickens. The Lord Chief Justice (afterwards Lord Chancellor) Campbell told Dickens that he would prefer the honor of having written that book to the honors which his professional exertions had obtained for him, that of being a peer of parliament and the nominal head of the law. All persons who have had a sufficiently large acquaintance with the men of practical ability who have risen to power in the United States, whether as judges, statesmen, or political economists, must have

been impressed with the opinion of these men as to the superiority of "The Pickwick Papers" over all the successive publications of Dickens. Yet it is as certain as any question coming before the literary critic can be, that a number of the works that followed "The Pickwick Papers" are superior to that publication, not only in force of sentiment, imagination, and characterization, but in everything which distinguishes the individual genius of Dickens, — a genius which, up to the time of "David Copperfield," deepened and enlarged in the orderly process of its development.

The secret of this preference for "The Pickwick Papers" is to be found in the fact that the author had, in that book, no favorite theory to push, no grand moral to enforce, no assault on principles about which educated men had made up their minds. These men could laugh heartily at Mr. Buzfuz and Mr. Justice Stareleigh; but when, as in "Bleak House," there was a serious attempt to assail equity jurispru-

dence, they felt that the humorist had ventured on ground where he had nothing but his genius to compensate for his lack of experience and knowledge. Thus it is that a work which, with all its wealth of animal spirits, is comparatively shallow and superficial considered as a full expression of Dickens's powers of humor, pathos, narrative, description, imagination, and characterization, has obtained a preeminence above its successors, not because it contains what is best and deepest in Dickens's genius, but because it omits certain matters relating to social and economical science, with which he was imperfectly acquainted, and on which his benevolence, misleading his genius, still urged him vehemently to dogmatize. His educated readers enjoyed his humor and pathos as before, but were more or less irritated by the intrusion of social theories which they had long dismissed from their minds as exploded fallacies, and did not see that the wit was more pointed, the humor richer, the faculty of constructing a story more developed, the

sentiment of humanity more earnest and profound, than in the inartistic incidents of "The Pickwick Papers," over which they had laughed until they had cried, and cried until they had laughed again. They desired amusement merely; "The Pickwick Papers" are the most amusing of Dickens's works; and they were correspondingly vexed with an author who deviated from the course of amusing them into that of instructing them, only to emphasize notions which were behind the knowledge of the time, and which interfered with their enjoyment without giving them any intelligent instruction.

Still, allowing for the prepossessions of Dickens in writing "Hard Times," and forgetting Adam Smith, Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill, — looking at him only as a humorous satirist, profoundly disgusted with some prominent evils of his day, — we may warmly praise the book as one of the most perfect of its kind. The bleakness of the whole representation of human life proceeds from the "Gradgrind Philosophy of Life," which

emphasizes Fact, and denounces all cultivation of the sentiments and the imagination. As a result of this system, Tom, the son of Mr. Gradgrind, becomes a selfish "whelp" and sneak thief; his daughter, Louisa, marries Mr. Bounderby, under circumstances which point inevitably to a separation, either on account of adultery or incompatibility of temper and disposition; and young Bitzer, the plebeian product of the system, who glories in his own emancipation from all the ties of son, brother, and husband, who is eloquent on the improvidence of those who marry and have children, and who congratulates himself that he has only one person to feed, and that 's the person he most likes to feed, namely, himself, is doomed to remain what he is, to the end of his life, — a soulless, heartless, calculating machine, almost too mean to merit even the spurn of contempt.

The first person who stirs the family of Mr. Gradgrind to a vague sense that the human mind possesses the faculty of imagin-

ation is Mr. Sleary, the circus-manager; and, in the end, he is the person who saves Tom Gradgrind from the disgrace of being arrested and tried as a felon. Dickens shows much art in making a man like Sleary, who represents the lowest element in the lowest order of popular amusements, the beneficent genius of the Gradgrind family, inclosed as they are in seemingly impenetrable surroundings of propriety, respectability, and prosaic fact. In depicting Sleary, the author escapes from satire into characterization, and adds to the population of Dickens-land one of his most humorously conceived and consistently drawn personages. While his hand is in he strikes off portraits of Master Kidderminster, Mr. E. W. B. Childers, and other members of the circus troupe, with almost equal vigor and fidelity to fact.

As a specimen of his humor, Sleary's description of the search which Merrylegs' dog made to find him, in order to inform him of his master's death, is incomparably good. Mr. Gradgrind, as a man of science, suggests that

the dog was drawn to him by his instinct and his fine scent. Mr. Sleary shakes his head skeptically. His idea is, that the dog went to another dog that he met on his journey, and asked him if he knew of a person of the name of Sleary, in the horse-riding way, — stout man, — game eye? And the other dog said that he could n't say he knew him himself, but he knew a dog who was likely to be acquainted with him, and then introduced him to that dog. And you know, Sleary added, that being much before the public, a number of dogs must be acquainted with me that *I* don't know. And Sleary goes on to show that after fourteen months' journey, the dog at last came to him in a very bad condition, lame and almost blind, threw himself up behind, stood on his fore legs, weak as he was, then wagged his tail and died. And then Sleary knew that the dog was the dog of Merrylegs. We have not put the narrative into Sleary's expressive lisp, and can only refer the reader to the original account in the eighth chapter of "Hard Times."

The relation between Mr. James Harthouse and Louisa, the wife of Mr. Bounderby, is one of the best "situations" in Dickens's novels. Harthouse represents a type of character which was the object of Dickens's special aversion, — the younger son of a younger son of family, "born bored," as Saint-Simon says of the Duke of Orleans, and passing listlessly through life in a constant dread of boredom, but seeking distractions and stimulants through new experiences, — "a thorough gentleman, made to the model of the time, weary of everything, and putting no more faith in anything than Lucifer." Contrasted with this jaded man of fashion is Louisa Gradgrind, the wife of Mr. Bounderby. Far from being morally and mentally wearied by too large an experience of life, she has had no experience of life at all. Her instincts, feelings, and imagination, as a woman, have been forced back into the interior recesses of her mind by the method of her education, and are, therefore, ever ready to

burst forth with an impetuosity corresponding to the force used in their repression and restraint.

Now Dickens, as an English novelist, was prevented, by his English sense of decorum, from describing in detail those sensuous and passionate elements in her nature which brought her to the point of agreeing to an elopement with her lover. A French novelist would have had no difficulty in this respect. Leaving out of view such romancers as Alexandre Dumas and Frederic Soulié, with what pleasure would story-tellers of a higher order, like Théophile Gautier, Prosper Mérimée, George Sand, and Charles de Bernard, have recorded their minute analysis of every phase of passion in the breasts of the would-be adulterer and the would-be adulteress! As it is, the reader finds it difficult to understand the frenzy of soul, the terrible tumult of feeling, which rends the heart of Louisa, as she flies to her father on the evening she has agreed to elope with her lover. Such madness

as she displays in the culmination of passion might have been explained by exhibiting, step by step, the growth of her passion. Instead of this, we are overwhelmed by the sudden passage of ice into fire, without any warning of the perilous transformation. The method of the French novelists is doubtless corrupting in just the degree in which it is interpretative. Whatever may be said of it, it at least accounts, on the logic of passion, for those crimes against the sanctity of the marriage relation, which all good people deplore but which few good people seem to understand.

It is needless to add, in this connection, any remarks on the singular purity of the relation existing between Rachael and Stephen Blackpool. Any reader who can contemplate it without feeling the tears gather in his eyes is hopelessly insensible to the pathos of Dickens in its most touching manifestations.

XIII

LITTLE DORRIT

THE first number of the romance of "Little Dorrit" [1] was issued on January 1, 1856, and it was concluded in June (a double number), 1857. The work has a twofold interest: first, because, in writing it, Dickens had begun to doubt the fertility of his genius in creating new forms of character; and, secondly, because he was discontented with his home, and was brooding over the ideal ills which led to his separation from his wife.

It may be said also that his misgivings regarding the continuance of his creative impulse were connected with his domestic disappointments. Both seem to have sprung from a pervading restlessness of body and mind, beginning about the year 1854, and culminating

[1] Dickens at first purposed calling the book *Nobody's Fault.*

in the breaking up of his home in May, 1858. As his representations of life and character increased in earnestness and depth with the growth of his genius, they required more and more isolation of mind to be adequately embodied; and this isolation he either found it difficult to secure, or was indisposed to make sacrifices in order to obtain it. Apart from social distractions interfering with his serious work, he threw himself with ardor into political agitation for administrative reforms, and engaged heartily in "quasi-public" private theatricals for charitable objects.

This mode of life, however consistent with the comparatively superficial characterization of "Pickwick" and "Nickleby," springing as it did from the happy combination of spontaneous genius with glad animal spirits, was not favorable to the more intense and profound characterizations of his later works, which exacted complete and long-continued self-absorption in the imagined persons whose interior and external life he aimed to realize and make

actual. He thought that his genius was deserting him when he should have seen that he was rather deserting his genius. The root of the difficulty was in his domestic discontents. He felt "an unhappy loss or want of something"; his imagination pampered this sense of loss and want by suggesting ideals of wives and children which were perfect in themselves; and hence, in the words of David Copperfield, he began to live, mentally, in the "so happy and yet so unhappy existence which seeks its realities in unrealities, and finds its dangerous comfort in perpetual escape from the disappointment of heart around it."

To this mood of mind we undoubtedly owe such beautiful embodiments of domestic perfection as Florence Dombey, Agnes, Esther Summerson, and Little Dorrit; but the period when he realized these ideals in his imagination was the same period in which his morbid discontent with his own domestic establishment was most marked. Harriet Martineau, in a letter dated March 20, 1873, referring to

Forster's "Life of Dickens," says: "In the second volume, I am much struck by Dickens's hysterical restlessness. *It must have been terribly wearing to his wife.* His friends ought to have seen that his brain was in danger,—from apoplexy, not insanity. To how great extent the women of his family are ignored in the book! The whole impression left by it is very melancholy." Yet Miss Martineau had in her Autobiography—written in 1855, when she felt she was under sentence of death—previously declared: "Every indication seems to show that the man [Dickens] himself is rising. He is a virtuous and happy family man, in the first place. His glowing and generous heart is kept steady by the best domestic influences; and we may fairly hope now that he will fulfil the natural purpose of his life, and stand by literature to the last; and again that he will be an honor to the high vocation by prudence as well as by power; so that the graces of genius and generosity may rest on the finest basis of probity and pru-

dence and that his old age may be honored as heartily as his youth and manhood have been admired. Nothing could exceed the frank kindness and consideration shown by him in the correspondence and the personal intercourse we have had; and my cordial regard has grown with my knowledge of him."

Miss Martineau, as a critic of persons she knew, never sinned on the side of toleration. Her picture, however, of Dickens as a husband and father, was altogether too flattering at the time (1855) she wrote the panegyric. A year at least before this period his morbid discontent with matters connected with his household had flashed out in his correspondence with his father-confessor, John Forster. His restlessness then, and for nearly four years afterwards, is evident in his private letters. "Too late," he says, in reply to Forster's monitions, "to put the curb on. I have no relief but in action. I am incapable of rest. I am quite confident I should rust, break, and die if I spared myself. Much better to die doing. What I

am in that way, nature made me first, and my way of life has of late, alas! confirmed. . . . I have felt of myself that I must, please God, die in harness. . . . It is much better to go on and fret, than to stop and fret. As to repose — for some men there 's no such thing in this life. . . . The old days — the old days! shall I ever, I wonder, get the frame of mind back as it used to be then? Something of it perhaps — but never quite as it used to be. *I find that the skeleton in my domestic closet is becoming a pretty big one.*"

Again he writes, in 1857: "Poor Catherine [his wife] and I are not made for each other, and there is no help for it. It is not only that she makes me uneasy and unhappy, but I make her so too — and much more so. She is exactly what you know, in the way of being amiable and complying; but we are strangely ill-assorted for the bond there is between us. God knows she would have been a thousand times happier if she had married another kind of man, and that her avoidance of

this destiny would have been at least equally good for us both. I am often cut to the heart by thinking what a pity it is for her own sake, that I ever fell in her way; and if I were sick or disabled to-morrow, I know how sorry she would be, and how deeply grieved myself, to think we had lost each other. Her temperament will not go with mine. It mattered not so much when we had only ourselves to consider, but reasons have been growing since which make it all but hopeless that we should try even to struggle on."

"You," he replies to Forster's remonstrance, "are not so tolerant as perhaps you might be of the wayward and unsettled feeling which is part (I suppose) of the tenure on which one holds an imaginative life, and which I have, as you ought to know well, often only kept down by riding over it like a dragoon — but let that go by. I make no maudlin complaint. I agree with you as to the very possible incidents, even not less bearable than mine, that might and must often occur to the married

condition when it is entered into very young. I am always deeply sensible of the wonderful exercise I have of life and its highest sensations, and have said to myself for years, and have honestly and truly felt, this is the drawback to such a career, and is not to be complained of. I say it and feel it now as strongly as ever I did; and, as I told you in my last, I do not with that view put all this forward. But the years have not made it easier to bear for either of us; and, for her sake as well as mine, the wish will force itself upon me that something might be done. I know too well it is impossible. There is the fact, and that is all one can say. Nor are you to suppose that I disguise from myself what might be urged on the other side. I claim no immunity from blame. There is plenty of fault on my side, I dare say, in the way of a thousand uncertainties, caprices, and difficulties of disposition; but only one thing will alter that, — the end that alters everything."

These private confidences to Forster are

valuable as exhibiting Dickens's moral and mental condition during the four years preceding his final separation from his wife. In March, 1858, when he had concluded to give public readings from his works for his own benefit, as he had given them before for charitable objects, he wrote to Forster: "Quite dismiss from your mind any reference whatever to present circumstances at home. Nothing can put *them* right, until we are all dead and buried and risen. It is not with me a matter of will, or trial, or sufferance, or good humor, or making the best of it, or making the worst of it, any longer. It is all despairingly over. Have no lingering hope of, or for me, in this association. A dismal failure has to be borne, and there an end."

The formal separation occurred in May, 1858. "Henceforward," says Forster, "he and his wife dwelt apart. The eldest son went with his mother, Dickens at once giving effect to her expressed wish in this respect; and the other children remained with himself, their

intercourse with Mrs. Dickens being left entirely to themselves."

If we read Dickens's confessions to Forster in connection with numerous passages in "David Copperfield," "Bleak House," and "Little Dorrit," we have little trouble in deciding that the cause of the separation between husband and wife was "incompatibility" of disposition and character. It will be remembered that Miss Martineau, after reading Forster's biography of her friend, speaks of his "hysterical restlessness" as something which must have been "terribly wearing to his wife." From this we are led to suppose that Mrs. Dickens, no less than Mr. Dickens, had reasons for believing that each would be happier by living apart from the other; and the separation itself was the result of a mutual agreement. There was no evidence presented at the time, and none has since been brought forward, that the husband was guilty of that crime which, in England, is vaguely indicated in the phrase "keeping two establishments."

There was nothing in the case which could have justified a suit for divorce, on the part of either husband or wife. Forster, who was the friend of both, had exerted all his influence to prevent the separation; and, when his endeavors proved fruitless, he declared it to be an "arrangement of a strictly private nature," and "that no decent person could have had excuse for regarding it in any other light."

But the fact was that, as soon as the "arrangement" was known, persons who would have been shocked at not being classed among decent people, began at once to circulate rumors invented by indecent persons, as to the true cause of the separation. Now Dickens was known wherever the English language was read, and it therefore took but a very short time to make a world-wide scandal out of this "strictly private" affair. In India, Australia, and the United States, as well as in Great Britain, the news was industriously circulated that the great romancer, whose special distinction was that he had shed new conse-

crations around the fireside and the home, was a hypocrite and an adulterer, who had imposed on the public by a Pecksniffian pretension to sentiments of purity and honor which his conduct belied. As the lies were in some degree circumstantial, they became a matter of wonder for a fortnight or a month, and were then consigned to the social gutters in which such lies commonly originate. Burke speaks somewhere of those occasions which furnish delicious opportunities for "low, sordid, ungenerous, and reptile souls to swell with their hoarded poisons"; and the moment that Dickens's separation from his wife was known, such creatures began to distribute their poisonous gossip through the whole community of Dickens's readers. The present editor clearly remembers with what a shock of painful surprise he first heard a circumstantial statement of these horrible calumnies, and how eager he was for an authoritative denial of them.

Forster, in his biography, thinks that Dick-

or ill-will of any kind, and the whole origin, progress, and surrounding circumstances of which have been throughout within the knowledge of my children. It is amicably composed, and its details have now but to be forgotten by those concerned in it. By some means arising out of wickedness, or out of folly, or out of inconceivable wild chance, or out of all three, this trouble has been made the occasion of misrepresentations, most grossly false, most monstrous, and most cruel — involving not only me, but innocent persons dear to my heart, and innocent persons of whom I have no knowledge, if, indeed, they have any existence — and so widely spread, that I doubt if one reader in a thousand will peruse these lines, by whom some touch of the breath of these slanderers will not have passed, like an unwholesome air. Those who know me and my nature need no assurance under my hand that such calumnies are as irreconcilable with me, as they are, in their frantic incoherence, with one another. But there

is a great multitude who know me through my writings, and who do not know me otherwise; and I cannot bear that one of them should be left in doubt, or hazard of doubt, through my poorly shrinking from taking the unusual means to which I now resort, of circulating the truth. I most solemnly declare, then, — and this I do, both in my own name and in my wife's name, — that all the lately whispered rumors touching the trouble at which I have glanced are abominably false. And that whosoever repeats one of them after this denial will lie as wilfully and as foully as it is possible for any false witness to lie, before Heaven and earth."

All this was thoroughly manly, resolute, and noble. There was no reference to the interior, the real causes of discontent between the husband and wife, such as were stated in the private letters (from which we have already largely quoted) of Dickens to Forster. But Dickens conceived that something further must be done to vindicate his character. Mr.

Arthur Smith was the person selected to be the business manager of his public readings; and he wrote to him an elaborate, half-defiant, half-apologetic letter, containing the private reasons which led to his separation from Mrs. Dickens. This letter was accompanied with a note to this effect: "You have not only my full permission to show this, but I beg you to show it to any one who wishes to do me right, or to any one who has been misled into doing me wrong." Mr. Smith not only showed it to individuals whose false impressions he desired to correct, but gave a copy of it to the London correspondent of the "New York Tribune," in which paper it was published in full, and thence made a tour of the world.

Such letters, indeed, written to be shown to this person and that, but not to be published, ever end in getting into print. Rufus Choate, in a Whig speech delivered during the excited period when Polk was a candidate for the Presidency of the United States, had occasion

to quote almost the whole of a private letter signed by prominent Anti-slavery democrats, which had been "surreptitiously" published in a New York journal. When he had completed the reading of it, he affected to be suddenly startled, and, holding the newspaper up before the eyes of the immense audience, he added, with an inimitable look of mock gravity: "By the way, gentlemen, I find that this document is marked 'private and confidential,' and such, I trust, you will all consider it!"

So it may be said in regard to Dickens's "violated" letter to Arthur Smith, that it contained information which invited violation, and which was sure to fall into the hands of some one who would violate it. Before commenting on this letter it is but just to reprint it.

LONDON, W. E.,
TAVISTOCK HOUSE, TAVISTOCK SQUARE,
Tuesday, Twenty-fifth May, 1858.

To ARTHUR SMITH, ESQ.: — Mrs. Dickens and I have lived unhappily together for many

years. Hardly any one who has known us intimately can fail to have known that we are, in all respects of character and temperament, wonderfully unsuited to each other. I suppose that no two people, not vicious in themselves, ever were joined together who had a greater difficulty in understanding one another, or who had less in common. An attached woman servant (more friend to both of us than a servant), who lived with us sixteen years, and is now married, and who was and still is in Mrs. Dickens's confidence and mine, who had the closest familiar experience of this unhappiness in London, in the country, in France, in Italy, wherever we have been, year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day, will bear testimony to this.

Nothing has, on many occasions, stood between us and a separation but Mrs. Dickens's sister, Georgina Hogarth. From the age of fifteen she has devoted herself to our house and children. She has been their playmate, nurse, instructress, friend, protectress, adviser, com-

panion. In the manly consideration towards Mrs. Dickens which I owe to my wife, I will only remark of her that the peculiarity of her character has thrown all the children on some one else. I do not know — I cannot by any stretch of fancy imagine — what would have become of them but for this aunt, who has grown up with them, to whom they are devoted, and who has sacrificed the best part of her youth and life to them.

She has remonstrated, reasoned, suffered, and toiled, and come again to prevent a separation between Mrs. Dickens and me. Mrs. Dickens has often expressed to her, her sense of her affectionate care and devotion in the house — never more strongly than within the last twelve months.

For some years past Mrs. Dickens has been in the habit of representing to me that it would be better for her to go away and live apart; that her always increasing estrangement was due to a mental disorder under which she sometimes labors; more, that she felt herself

unfit for the life she had to lead, as my wife, and that she would be better far away. I have uniformly replied that she must bear our misfortune, and fight the fight out to the end; that the children were the first consideration; and that I feared they must bind us together in "appearance."

At length, within these three weeks, it was suggested to me by Forster that, even for their sakes, it would surely be better to reconstruct and rearrange their unhappy home. I empowered him to treat with Mrs. Dickens, as the friend of both for one and twenty years. Mrs. Dickens wished to add, on her part, Mark Lemon, and did so. On Saturday last Lemon wrote to Forster that Mrs. Dickens "gratefully and thankfully accepted" the terms I proposed to her. Of the pecuniary part of them I will only say that I believe they are as generous as if Mrs. Dickens were a lady of distinction, and I a man of fortune. The remaining parts of them are easily described — my eldest boy to live with Mrs. Dickens and take

care of her; my eldest girl to keep my house; both my girls, and all my children but the eldest son, to live with me in the continued companionship of their Aunt Georgina, for whom they have all the tenderest affection that I have ever seen among young people, and who has a higher claim (as I have often declared, for many years) upon my affection, respect, and gratitude than anybody in this world.

I hope that no one who may become acquainted with what I write here, can possibly be so cruel and unjust as to put any misconstruction on our separation, so far. My elder children all understand it perfectly, and all accept it as inevitable. There is not a shadow of doubt or concealment among us. My eldest son and I are one as to it all.

Two wicked persons, who should have spoken very differently of me, in consideration of earnest respect and gratitude, have (as I am told, and, indeed, to my personal knowledge) coupled with this separation the name of a young lady for whom I have a great attach-

ment and regard. I will not repeat her name — I honor it too much. Upon my soul and honor, there is not on this earth a more virtuous and spotless creature than that young lady. I know her to be innocent and pure, and as good as my own dear daughters.

Further, I am quite sure that Mrs. Dickens, having received this assurance from me, must now believe it in the respect I know her to have for me, and in the perfect confidence I know her in her better moments to repose in my truthfulness.

On this head, again, there is not a shadow of doubt or concealment between my children and me. All is open and plain among us, as though we were brothers and sisters. They are perfectly certain that I would not deceive them, and the confidence among us is without a fear. C. D.

The essential wrong committed in this letter consisted, not so much in its publication, as in its composition. The mutual agreement be-

tween the parties to the separation proceeded on the ground that there should be no statement of the reasons for the separation. That agreement was practically broken by Dickens when he placed such a garrulous and querulous letter in the hands of Mr. Arthur Smith, to be "shown" to persons who credited the current rumors against his character. In defending himself he himself assails his wife. He gives the reasons why he can no longer live with *her!* one naturally asks for the reasons why she cannot live with *him*. There was no guilt on either side; but Mrs. Dickens, had she chosen to reply, might doubtless have shown that, as a family man, he developed qualities of temper and disposition which, from her point of view, were as repugnant to domestic happiness and harmony as any which, from his point of view, appeared to make her an unsympathetic, unsatisfactory, repellent wife. The whole matter should have rested on the original statement of "incompatibility"; but if the husband entered into

details, the wife would have been justified in following his example. From Mrs. Dickens, however, proceeded no word of remonstrance and complaint; yet by submitting to the imputations conveyed or implied in her husband's unfortunate letter, she placed him unavoidably in a position repugnant to the feelings of a gentleman and man of honor. Without any malicious purpose, he was heedlessly impelled, by the atrocity of the libels against himself, into making explanations which injured her in public estimation; and her silence must have self-convicted him, when the heat and irritation of the hour had passed away, of a violation of that sense of chivalry towards women which was as much a permanent sentiment of his heart as it was a constant inspiration of his genius.

In truth, the circumstances connected with his separation from his wife exhibited Dickens in the most ungenial and unamiable mood. The same force of will which made so effective all his good qualities, both of disposition

and of genius, was subject at times to strange fits of wilfulness, when he became altogether unmanageable and defiant of external control, even of that control which the love, the reason, and the prudence of his nearest and dearest friends brought to bear on his headlong self-assertion. Against the admonitions of Forster, to whom he opened his heart, he persisted in pushing his domestic discontents to the point of separating from his wife; and, until the scandals arising from that act were forced on his attention, he thought the public would not trouble itself with his domestic concerns. Up to this point he had carried out his will freely; the reaction against him was terrible, but it only stimulated his combativeness; his combativeness intensified his will into self-will; and the result was the letter to Mr. Arthur Smith, in which he forgot the rights of his wife in emphasizing his own.

The whole thing is a wretched episode in Dickens's life; but we must still remember that it was an aberration of character, and not

an example of its normal and healthy exercise. For years after this unfortunate event, as for years before it, Dickens showed that his character was sound at the core. He was betrayed into injustice by the perversion of qualities excellent in themselves.

It has been considered proper to refer to the subject of Dickens's separation from his wife in the Introduction to the present novel, because in writing it he was specially under the influence of the feelings which led to that important event in his life.

The story of "Little Dorrit" is but a thin thread on which to hang so many characters and incidents. Dickens's original intention was ingenious. "It struck me," he wrote to Forster, "that it would be a new thing to show people coming together, in a chance way, ignorant of one another, as happens in life; and to connect them afterwards, and to make the waiting for that connection a part of the interest." Thus when Mr. Meagles, in the second chapter, bids good-by to Miss Wade,

and adds, "We may never meet again," the haughty self-tormentor replies: "In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet *us*, from many strange places and by many strange roads; and what it is set to us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done." Then, turning to Pet Meagles, she says: "You may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with *you*, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands, of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know, or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town." At the conclusion of the chapter comes this remark: "And thus ever, by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act

and react on each other, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life."

Dickens considered that he had missed an effect by making the "fellow-travellers" in the Marseilles boat known to each other, and thought of rewriting the chapter. "Last night and this morning," he wrote to Forster, "I had half a mind to begin again, and work in what I have done, afterwards"; but he shrank from the labor of recasting his material, and left the chapter as it stands. As there were thirty persons in the company on board the steamer, and as only Arthur Clennam, Miss Wade, and the family of the Meagleses became afterwards connected in their fortunes, the general idea was not much impaired by putting it into the mouth of Miss Wade, as a scornful and defiant rebuff to the exuberant kindness of her accidental acquaintances. The ominous fact remains, that the conditions on which individual life is held are beyond individual control. The man of the largest intelligence cannot discern, foresee, or evade the

apparent accidents which may eventually bless or blast his fortunes.

This vague sense of the mystery of human life, so far as it is independent of human will and contrivance, filled Dickens's imagination while he was writing the early portions of "Little Dorrit"; and the first chapter, picturing the villain Blandois in his Marseilles dungeon, ignorant of the influence he is to have on the fortunes of the seven strangers fretting under the inconveniences of being detained in the harbor of Marseilles, is the fit prelude to the second. But Dickens gradually lost hold of his central idea; and, as usual with him, he multiplied characters so interesting in themselves, that what they do to carry on the original plan of the work is subordinate to their special attraction as individuals, seemingly bent on expressing their own idiosyncrasies at all risks of interfering with a clear perception of the main design. It may be said that three quarters, nay, seven eighths, of the story have no direct relation to the plot except to

retard the catastrophe. It cannot be affirmed that any prominent personage or incident is introduced without a purpose; but, so far as regards the development of the story, paragraphs might have been substituted for chapters.

Yet the general reader finds little fault with that over-richness in details which sometimes displeases the critic; for in "Little Dorrit," as in the other novels of Dickens, he is introduced to a new world of realistic romance, peopled with new inhabitants, and abounding in new stimulants to his heart and imagination. Considered as a whole, "Little Dorrit" is inferior to "Dombey and Son," "David Copperfield," and "Bleak House"; but its inferiority is not so much due to a decay of power in the indefatigable discoverer and explorer of Dickensland, as it is to the inferior interest and value of the new province he has added to that delightful domain. In originality and novelty it is equal to the other settlements established in that heretofore undiscovered region of the imagination; but the inhabitants

are less pleasing, the soil less productive, and the atmosphere less bright and bracing.

If Dickens, like Balzac, Thackeray, and Anthony Trollope, had repeated in each successive romance the characters which had most impressed the public imagination in its predecessor, — had he insisted on pushing Tony Weller, or Mr. Pickwick, or Mrs. Gamp, or Captain Cuttle, into romances where they were neither necessary nor new, — he might doubtless have done what Balzac, Thackeray, and Trollope have succeeded in doing: that is, he might have established a kind of relationship between his different works. In reading "La Comédie Humaine" we become accustomed to tolerate the reappearance of Henri de Marsay, Maxime de Trailles, Nucingen, Rastignac, and Bixiou, as observers or actors in romances widely different in plot from those in which they made their first appearance. After "Vanity Fair" and "Pendennis," we never lose sight of the family of the Crawleys and the Warringtons, of Arthur Pendennis and

Laura, not to mention others. The last result of this method is seen in Trollope's novel of "The Prime Minister," a work as long as "Daniel Deronda," but in which there are only three or four comparatively insignificant characters, which are not prominent in the author's previous novels.

But each of Dickens's romances is a little world within itself, having no connection whatever with any little world portrayed in any other. In the design of "Master Humphrey's Clock," Mr. Pickwick and the Wellers were introduced anew, but so slightly that few readers now dream that "The Old Curiosity Shop" and "Barnaby Rudge" were at first published under the general title of "Master Humphrey's Clock."

The central figure in the novel of "Little Dorrit" is the brave, affectionate, patient, unobtrusive, thoughtful, modest, self-denying girl who bears the name. All her virtues seem to meet and unite in one, namely, fortitude. As the ideal embodiment of filial affection,

placed amid sordid surroundings which make her father, brother and sister hopelessly selfish and petulant, she rises superior to them all, and suprises us, not so much by what she actively does, as by what she quietly endures. Such a quaintly beautiful example of strong, uncomplaining, invulnerable fortitude, — unconscious of any merit in self-sacrifices which spontaneously spring from a sense of duty vitalized by an all-engrossing filial affection, — is hardly paralleled in the literature of romance. There is also a subtle, indescribable pathos connected with the exquisite moral beauty of the character, — something plaintive, beseeching, — something which irresistibly appeals to all persons with whom she comes in contact, and softens folly, ruffianism, and hardheartedness into involuntary respect, — something which conducts us into the unexpressed and inexpressible depths of the human heart, and which converts even seeming hopelessness and helplessness into magnetic forces. Arthur Clennam, of course, feels this influence; but Pancks also

feels it; Flora Casby, in spite of her superficiality,[1] and Mrs. Clennam, in spite of her iron bigotry, feel it; and if Little Dorrit had come into relations with Miss Wade, she would have succeeded in doing what Pet Meagles, with all her lovely innocence and affectionateness, failed to accomplish, that is, she would have convinced that perverse maiden that she had a soul.

It will be observed that throughout the

[1] Mr. Forster asserts that an early love of Dickens's sat for the portrait, first of Dora in *David Copperfield*, and later of Flora in *Little Dorrit*. "The fancy," he says, "had a comic humour in it he found it impossible to resist, but it was kindly and pleasant to the last; and if the later picture showed him plenty to laugh at in this retrospect of his youth, there was nothing he thought of more tenderly than the earlier, as long as he was conscious of anything." Dickens himself, in a letter to the Duke of Devonshire, says: "I am so glad you like Flora. It came into my head one day that we have all had our Floras, and that it was a half-serious, half-ridiculous truth which had never been told. It is a wonderful gratification to me to find that everybody knows her. Indeed, some people seem to think I have done them a personal injury, and that their individual Floras (God knows where they are, or who!) are each and all Little Dorrits!"

varied scenes in which she appears, Dickens never loses his hold on the depth of her nature, and ever succeeds in conveying to the reader an impression of her exceptional goodness, not so much by what she says, or even by what she does, as by what she *is*. Her intrinsic excellence is invested with a pathetic charm which sends happy tears into all sympathetic eyes. Forster thinks she is unreal, — an unfortunate criticism on a character which is so easily and thoroughly realized by the heart and imagination. We do not of course meet such daughters in actual life, but we sometimes meet young women whose filial love suggests the ideal which she attains; and Dickens's conception of the character is so intense, that she becomes more real to the mind than even those actual persons who exhibit some of her qualities. The marvel of the whole representation is, that it seems so natural, as we read, that this "child of the Marshalsea," born and bred in a debtors' prison, should not yield to the bad influences of the

place. Her brother Edward becomes a vicious vagabond, and her sister Fannie a shallow, selfish, impudent hoyden, through the mere fact of being the children of an imprisoned father, and thus left to win or lose their way in the world, without even such weak control as he might have exerted over them had he been free to assume paternal authority. Forster thinks that Edward and Fanny are real enough, — real to the point of being unattractive; but in denying reality to Amy, he forgets that the whole power of the writer is put forth to show how insensibly and inevitably the circumstances of her prison life strengthen her sense of duty to her father, and how naturally she is developed into the perfection of simple, homely goodness of heart and integrity of mind, by transmuting, through the inborn felicity of her nature, the influences calculated to corrupt ordinary children into the nutriment of disinterested affection and unrepining endurance.

It is a great mistake of criticism to call un-

natural a nature which simply embodies the best human qualities in a most beautiful and persuasive form. Little Dorrit, indeed, is thoroughly practical. She indulges in no fine sentiments — and is the least romantic of heroines. She is not even "clever" in the intellectual sense of the term. In fact she is a mere drudge, working with her needle outside the prison, and toiling hard within it, in order that her weak father may not be deprived of any comforts to which he has been accustomed. Her beautiful soul finds expression only in homely acts of daily self-denial; she is unconscious that there is anything meritorious in what duty and affection prompt her to do; and she is equally unconscious that her father, or brother, or sister, owe her any debt of gratitude, merely because her life is passed in unrequited devotion to their interests and needs. Arthur Clennam, when he first meets her in his mother's house, where she is engaged as a seamstress, is impressed by her contrivances to secure the eating of her meals alone, — he

only learning afterwards that her object in this is to have the means of carrying to her father the best portions of the food intended for herself. He finds that "it was not easy to make out her face; she was so retiring, plied her needle in such remote corners, and started away so scared if encountered on the stairs. But it seemed to be a pale, transparent face, quick in expression, though not beautiful in feature, its soft hazel eyes excepted. A delicately bent head, a tiny form, a quick little pair of busy hands, and a shabby dress — it must needs have been very shabby to look at all so, being so neat — were Little Dorrit as she sat at work."

The father who was the object of her measureless love and constant care was known, through his long confinement of over twenty years in the debtors' prison, as "the Father of the Marshalsea" as she was known as its "child." We have had repeated occasions to point out how thoroughly Dickens identifies himself with his prominent personages — how,

in his own words, he lives for the time "inside of them" — how watchful he is of every movement of their souls — and how his faculty of psychological analysis is ever shown in connection with the external marks and signs he selects as expressions of their internal moods of mind and vacillations of character. His power in this respect is limited to what may be called the lower classes and the middle classes of the world of romance; he cannot dwell "inside" of a Faust or a Hamlet; and the native, inborn, ideal aristocrats of intellect and character, such as are represented by the greatest romancers, poets, and dramatists, demanding, as they do, in their creators immense range, elevation, and fertility of thought, are characters that he, like the rest of us, must be content to look upon from the outside; but in descending from the heights of imaginative creativeness, where can we find a superior to him, considered as a representative genius of the *bourgeoisie*?

Certainly nothing of its kind can be better

than the internal and external representation of William Dorrit, from the time he enters the Marshalsea prison to the time he leaves it; and the "jail rot" upon him, studiously covered over as it is by the affectations of gentility which his after prosperity leads him to adopt, breaks out anew in a terrible fashion when death suddenly beckons him to the Marshalsea of the grave. The amount of intellect and imagination expended on the delineation of this character is so great, that the reader feels it to be disproportioned to the essential value and importance of the character itself, looked at as an addition to the population of Dickens-land. Nothing can be more masterly than the power exhibited by Dickens in the clutch he constantly holds on the inmost soul of the man, while he indicates the most evanescent shades of impulse, feeling, thought, and purpose, which the varying circumstances of the story awaken in his consciousness. The scenes in which his heart unveils itself in the presence of his self-immolating child have a pathos

finer than that of the old classical tradition of the daughter who feeds her imprisoned and famine-doomed sire with milk from her own breast. Byron, addressing this prototype of Little Dorrit, exclaims:—

"The starry fable of the milky way
Has not thy story's purity; it is
A constellation of a sweeter ray,
And sacred Nature triumphs more in this
Reverse of her decree, than in the abyss
Where sparkle distant worlds."

But Dickens rightly declares that his heroine, "though of the unheroic modern stock, and mere English, did much more in comforting her father's wasted heart upon her innocent breast, and turning to it a fountain of love and fidelity that never ran dry or waned, through all his years of famine."

In the nineteenth chapter of the book, where the father begins by reproving Amy for not doing some unmaidenly thing which might increase *his* comforts at the expense of *her* truthfulness, and ends in breaking down in an agony of self-reproach and shame, nothing can

be more heart-touching than the daughter's efforts to soothe him, and to restore the self-esteem which a sudden vision of his degradation had shattered. And then, after he was quietly laid asleep, what a prayer was that which rose up to Heaven from his bedside! "O spare his life! O save him to me! O look down on my dear, long-suffering, unfortunate, much-changed, dear, dear father!"

In the thirty-fifth chapter, where Mr. Dorrit is informed of the change in his fortunes, Dickens shows himself a master in his art. When his daughter speaks to him, with tears in her eyes, of the "joyful and wonderful intelligence" she has to tell him, and asks him to be prepared to receive it, he puts "his hand suddenly to his heart" and looks at Arthur Clennam; and while Clennam anxiously informs him that he must expect one of those surprises of joy that sometimes happen in life, he still keeps his left hand over his heart, while, with his right hand, he puts his spectacles "exactly level on the table." No ro-

mancer who was not present *in* the character, as well as present at the scene itself, would have thought of recording the latter involuntary movement. When he asks what surprise is intended for him, he slowly stretched out "the hand that had been upon his heart, and pointed at the wall." "It is down," said Clennam, — "gone." Then, after a few words of explanation, the daughter, laying her face against the face of her still wondering and uncertain father, "encircled him in the hour of his prosperity with her arms, as she had in the long years of his adversity encircled him with her love and toil and truth; and poured out her full heart in gratitude, hope, joy, blissful ecstasy, — and all for him. 'I shall see him, as I never saw him yet. I shall see my dear love, with the dark cloud cleared away. I shall see him, as my poor mother saw him long ago. O my dear, my dear! O father, father! O thank God, thank God!' He yielded himself to her kisses and caresses, but did not return them, except that he put an arm round her. Neither

Arthur Clennam is moved to confide in this peculiar specimen of a practical man the experiences of his early life. "I am," he tells him, "the son of a hard father and mother. I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything. . . . Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this world and terror in the next—nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere—this was my childhood, if I may so misuse the word as to apply it to such a beginning of life." The practical sense of Mr. Meagles is shocked at the unpracticality of such a system of education, and can only advise that Arthur must now study and profit by all that lies beyond such a tough commencement of life, "like a practical man,"—which, it must be admitted, Arthur does.

Mrs. Clennam, the supposed mother of Arthur, is a caricature of Calvinism,—a creed that specially repelled Dickens. The plot of the story is based on the inexorable deter-

mination of this self-accusing, self-righteous woman, to refuse to admit the fact that she is not the real mother of Arthur, and to conceal the wrong she has done to Little Dorrit. Chapter after chapter in the novel is devoted to her and the Flintwinches, her attendants. There can be little doubt that they occupy too large a portion of the story, and that Dickens employed on them a vast amount of imaginative toil which might have been profitably exercised on more pleasing creations. Affery, especially, is spun out to the point where she becomes absolutely wearisome. The villain of the story, Blandois, holds the documents which convict Mrs. Clennam of doing some things which sinful worldlings call crimes, but which are justified to her conscience by motives which she considers religious, and which, in fact, spring from wofully perverted maxims of her religious creed. But she is really surprised, after preaching all her life the doctrine of the utter depravity of human nature, to meet, in Blandois, an utterly depraved man.

Yet is not Dickens himself, while holding up Mrs. Clennam as a horrible example of the inhumanity of the Calvinistic dogma, guilty of being an accomplice of Calvin? If there is any passage in his works which most intensely exhibits his abhorrence of the criminal nature, it is the speech which Blandois hears from the lips of the landlady of the obscure inn, where he stops for the night. His crime is the subject of discussion among the guests of the common room of the tavern, and one philosophical philanthropist, calmly smoking, suggests that the scoundrel might have been the victim of unfortunate circumstances, and that there may have been "some good in him, if any one did but know how to find it out." "Hold there, you and your philanthropy," exclaimed the landlady; "I know nothing of philosophical philanthropy. But I know what I have seen, and what I have looked in the face, in this world here, where I find myself. And I tell you, my friend, that there are people (men and women both, unfortunately) who

have no good in them — none. That there are people whom it is necessary to detest without compromise. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race. That there are people who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts, and cleared out of the way."

What, to a professional philanthropist, can be more horrible than this blunt denial of any possible moral or human instinct in a whole class of men? Even Mrs. Clennam would not have gone so far in condemning any son of Adam. She would have insisted that there was left in the basest, most beastly nature, some faint recognition of a moral law revealed in consciousness by the fact of its violation. Dickens dehumanizes the criminal he denounces — denies that he has soul enough to qualify him for the dignity of being everlastingly damned — and declares that he should be killed at sight, as we would kill a tiger or a rattlesnake. The theology of Mrs. Clennam, harsh as it is, would be shocked by the principles announced

by the landlady of the Break of Day. Indeed, in dealing with depravity, the champions of the amiable view of human nature are ever liable to the weakness of expelling conspicuous scoundrels, like Blandois and Merdle in the present narrative, from any connection with humanity. Calvinism, with an austere view of human nature in the abstract and in the concrete, never hesitates to grapple, through its doctrine of grace, with the wickedness of the worst criminals, — criminals whom Dickens would wish to annihilate, body and soul.

Blandois was suggested probably by one who may be called Dickens's favorite villain, Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, the forger, poisoner, and man of letters, the associate of Charles Lamb and of the other eminent contributors to the "London Magazine" — a man who was, to all appearance, utterly destitute of any inward restraint which interfered with his commission of ingeniously calculated murders. Dickens, by the very fullness of his own benevolent instincts, was strangely attract-

ed to this abnormal specimen of criminal humanity. He wrote an article on him, detailing the peculiarities of his crimes as distinguished from the crimes of ordinary poisoners and forgers, and he made him the chief personage in his thrilling story of "Hunted Down." Wainwright was a fop as well as a forger, and the homicide ever kept up the manners of the coxcomb. As a gentleman, he professed a profound contempt for the lower classes, and always prided himself on keeping them in an inferior position. In Newgate he occupied a cell with a bricklayer and a sweep for companions. When questioned as to his crimes, he complacently asserted that in one thing he had succeeded from first to last. "I have," he declared, "been determined through life to hold the position of a gentleman. I have always done so; I do still. It is the custom of this place that each of the inmates of a cell shall take his morning's turn in sweeping it out. I occupy a cell with a bricklayer and a sweep. But, by G—, they never offer me the broom!"

It will be remembered that John Baptist, in the present novel, instinctively becomes the servant of Blandois, on all the occasions where he is brought into abhorred relations with him. In the sixty-fourth chapter, the little Italian obeys the commands of Blandois in minor matters of attention to his wants, even after he has hunted him down, and brought him as a captive before Arthur Clennam. In compounding the character of this ideal villain, Blandois, Dickens seems to have kept some of the peculiarities of the actual Wainwright steadily in view.

The satire of the novel of "Little Dorrit" is even superior to the majority of its elaborate presentations of individual character. Nothing of its kind can be more lively and brilliant than the assault on the Circumlocution Office, which is, in effect, an attack on the whole system of English government.[1] It is now

[1] In a letter to Macready, written just after he had introduced the Circumlocution Office into his novel, Dickens says: "In No. 3 of my new book I have been blowing off a little of indignant steam which

affirmed that the civil service of Great Britain is the most perfect in the world. No person can be made a clerk in any department of the government (except the diplomatic), until he has been subjected to a severe examination as to his qualifications for the particular post he is ambitious to occupy. The salaries are small; the tests of merit are terribly severe; and the Prime Minister himself, — he who is for the time the practical king of Great Britain and Ireland, and the practical Emperor of India, — is impotent to bestow the most insignificant clerkship on an incompetent applicant for it. This complete revolution in the English civil service has occurred since "Little Dorrit" was written; but the principle that minor offices were not the spoils of contending politicians,

would otherwise blow me up, and with God's leave I shall walk in the same all the days of my life: but I have no present political faith or hope — not a grain." A review of *Little Dorrit* in the *Edinburgh Review* [for July, 1857: "The License of Modern Novelists"], touching upon this subject, called out a rejoinder by Dickens, under the title *Curious Misprint in the Edinburgh Review*.

to be scrambled for at each change in the administration of the government, was accepted at the period when Dickens denounced the civil service of his country as consisting of a pack of aristocratic imbeciles, destitute of sense and judgment, and depending for the offices they held, not on their own merits, but on the patronage of the lordly Barnacles who fastened on the ship of state.

It is obvious that, if Dickens's representation was true, it would have required but a very few years to ruin a nation, where a stupid Lord Decimus was at the head of affairs, where a set of buttoned-up Barnacles affronted good sense in their speeches to a stupid parliament which submitted to the despotism of their foolish phrases, and where such an idiot as Mr. Sparkler was made a Commissioner of the Treasury. No government, whether European or Asiatic, could exist for a score of years, under the lead of such fatwitted heads directing under-witted subordinates. The whole representation is therefore extravagantly satirical,

and was intended to strike at and emphasize the abuses of the system attacked.

As in "Bleak House" Dickens had assailed the whole system of Equity Jurisprudence, by vividly depicting some of the bad consequences resulting from exceptional cases of delay in the judgments of the Court of Chancery, so in "Little Dorrit" he made war on all the checks which the experienced intelligence of mankind has devised to prevent folly and rascality from plundering the public. Dickens fastens on the delays of the Circumlocution Office, as he had previously fastened on the delays of the Chancery Court, in order to show that these delays sometimes work cruel injustice to individuals; as far as he goes he carries the sympathies of the public with him; but how few of his readers stop to reflect what an opening for knaves would be afforded by a year's cessation of those stringent, roundabout rules, which check scoundrels in official place! For one plain, honest man, who is exasperated by the "circumlocution" which enters into the

able intercourse. Mr. Merdle, the undetected thief and forger, gives dinners and parties, at which Mrs. Merdle, superb in her display of "bosom," presides, and to which the Barnacles, and the heads of the church and the law, joyfully throng. The satirical representation of "Bar," with his "double eye-glass and his insinuating little jury droop," was generally recognized as a life-like portrait of Sir Fitzroy Kelly; but the bishop, so mild and equable, so Christian in temper and judgment, so seemingly ignorant of all the intrigues which pass unheeded before his holy eyes, and so perfect a specimen of the decencies and proprieties befitting a dignitary of the Church — who was the person that Dickens intended to hit in this impersonated sarcasm? Perhaps it was Bishop Wilberforce; but the points of agreement between this typical bishop and the prelate we have named are not more numerous than the points of difference which his friends might enumerate. Whoever was meant, the satire was none the

less sharp, — inasmuch as the Church is introduced to indorse the respectability of the financial wolf who is engaged in fleecing the flock under the very eye of the shepherd.

Perhaps there is not, among all the characters of the novel, a more astonishing creature than "Mr. F.'s Aunt," whose sentences are exploded from her mouth like cannon-balls, and do almost as much execution. Of all the grotesque creations of Dickens's imagination she ranks among the foremost in raciness and originality. Her minute guns, fired in the course of conversation, are all the more effective from being heard in the intervals of the unpunctuated velocity of Flora Finching's incoherent talk. Mr. and Mrs. Plornish, of Bleeding Heart Yard, belong to the best class of Dickens's humbler characters. Young John Chivery, the despairing lover of Little Dorrit, is an example of Dickens's power to redeem vulgarity and absurdity from contempt by vitalizing both with sentiment. In Thackeray's hands, John would appear as nothing

more than a poor, little, foolish snob; but Dickens, without sparing a single trait which makes John ridiculous, contrives to exalt him into a kind of hero, by showing the disinterestedness of the passion which, though it urges him to do some things which are laughable, preserves him from doing anything which is not in substance honorable, self-sacrificing, and good.

Of the many felicities and quaint oddities of expression, with which the work is rich to overflowing, the queerest, perhaps, occurs in the exposure which Pancks makes of the hypocrisy of his employer. "Did anybody," he shouts to the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, "ever find boiled mutton and caper-sauce growing out of a cocoanut?" To the honor of Mr. Casby's tenants it must be said that they at once denied having for a moment indulged in such a delusion. Perhaps Mr. Dorrit's eulogy on Mr. Merdle may fairly claim a place by the side of the eloquence of Mr. Pancks. "Mr. Merdle's

undertakings," he says, "are immense. They bring him in such vast sums of money, that they are regarded as — national benefits." And perhaps the finest sentence in all Dickens's writings is that in which the workmen in Mr. Doyce's yard give him a final cheer as he departs for Russia. "In truth," says Dickens, "no men on earth can cheer like Englishmen, who do so rally one another's blood and spirit when they cheer in earnest, *that the stir is like the rush of their whole history, with all its standards waving at once, from Saxon Alfred's downward.*"

While "Little Dorrit" was in course of publication, and Mr. Dickens was felicitating himself on the constant additions to his already immense army of readers, he wrote to Forster: "I was ludicrously foiled here the other night in a resolution I have kept for twenty years not to know of any attack upon myself, by stumbling, before I could pick myself up, on a short extract in the 'Globe' from 'Blackwood's Magazine,' informing me that 'Little

Dorrit' is 'twaddle.' I was sufficiently put out by it to be angry with myself for being such a fool, and then pleased with myself for having so long been constant to a good resolution." He undoubtedly was right in refusing to read any criticism on his works which was palpably the offspring of flippancy or malice, for the smallest creature that holds a pen can insult the mightiest genius, by tossing at him a contemptuous judgment couched in an offensive word. Tittlebat Titmouse is an execrable specimen of humanity in whatever department of human effort he appears; but it is perhaps on the judgment seat of criticism that his insolent littleness of soul is most exasperatingly displayed. In the present case he had, by chance, an opportunity to hit Dickens; and it is curious to note how a just contempt for the critic was ineffective to allay the transient smart of the wound.

Forster contrasts Dickens's mortification at this insult, and his deeper mortification at feeling that he could for the moment be pained

by the insult of the Titmice of criticism, with a scene that occurred four months after his death. "It was the meeting of Bismarck and Jules Favre under the walls of Paris. The Prussian was waiting to open fire on the city; the Frenchman was engaged in the arduous task of showing the wisdom of not doing it, and 'we learn,' say the papers of the day, 'that while the two eminent statesmen were trying to find a basis of negotiation, Von Moltke was seated in a corner reading "Little Dorrit."' Who will doubt," Forster adds, "that the chapter on How Not to Do It was then absorbing the old soldier's attention?"

XIV

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

"A TALE OF TWO CITIES" is one of the most thrilling narratives in the whole of the literature of fiction. Considered apart from all the other works of Dickens, it would entitle him to a very high rank among romancers. The provoking pauses in the progress of his other stories, made for the purpose of introducing new characters, are not observable in this, which seems to be spurred and driven on by some overmastering power above and back of the author, making him

> "Like one, that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round, walks on
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread."

The stimulant which kindled Dickens's imagination was Carlyle's wonderful prose epic,

"The French Revolution," which so captivated him that he re-read it a score of times with ever new delight. After he had decided to write the tale, Carlyle furnished him with many of the books he had himself used in preparing his work, which aided Dickens in gaining a vivid conception of the condition of France, both while the Revolution was impending and after it had rushed into its worst excesses. The idea of the story was working vaguely in his mind when he was specially disturbed by his domestic troubles; it grew into shape gradually; and, after his quarrel with the publishers of "Household Words" had impelled him to establish the weekly periodical, "All the Year Round," he inaugurated his new enterprise by publishing, on April 30, 1859, the opening portions of "A Tale of Two Cities." The story at once carried the circulation of the weekly up to an average sale varying between thirty and forty thousand copies.

Before venturing on the publication, he had

the usual correspondence with Forster, as to choosing an appropriate title. "One of These Days" was his first choice; then came "Buried Alive!" then "The Thread of Gold"; then "The Doctor of Beauvais." The idea of the plot had been brooding in his mind nearly a year before he finally decided on something which would fit, as he said, the opening of the story "to a T," — "A Tale of Two Cities."

As the work went on, he was gratified by a letter from Carlyle warmly praising it. "I set myself the little task," he wrote to Forster, "of making a *picturesque* story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express, more than they should express themselves, by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I fancied a story of incident might be written (in place of the bestiality that *is* written under that pretence), pounding the characters out in its own mortar, and beating their own interests out of them." To Forster's historical objections, that the feudal cruelties did not come within the

date of the action sufficiently to justify his use of them, Dickens returned a ready answer.[1]

"I had, of course," he said, "full knowledge of the formal surrender of the feudal privileges, but these had been bitterly felt quite as near to the time of the Revolution as the doctor's narrative, which you will remember dates long before the Terror. With the slang of the new philosophy on the one side, it was surely not unreasonable or unallowable, on the other, to suppose a nobleman wedded to the old cruel ideas and representing the time going out, as his nephew represents the time coming in. If there be anything certain on earth, I take it that the condition of the French peasant generally at that day was intolerable. No later inquiries or provings by figures will hold water against the tremendous testimony of men living at the time. . . . I

[1] The letter which follows appears to have been written to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton in answer to his strictures, though as given by Forster one would naturally infer that Forster was the correspondent and critic.

am not clear, and I never have been clear, respecting the canon of fiction which forbids the interposition of accident in such a case as Madame Defarge's death. Where the accident is inseparable from the action and passion of the character; where it is strictly consistent with the entire design, and arises out of some culminating proceeding on the part of the individual which the whole story has led up to, it seems to me to become, as it were, an act of divine justice. And when I use Miss Pross (though this is quite another question) to bring about such a catastrophe, I have the positive intention of making that half comic intervention a part of the desperate woman's failure; and of opposing that mean death, instead of a desperate one in the streets, which she would n't have minded, to the dignity of Carton's. Wrong or right, this was all design, and seemed to me to be in the fitness of things."

In all this, Dickens shows himself an admirable interpretative critic, — at least of his own work. Nothing could be better than his

reasons, except the masterly way in which he carried out the design which the reasons fully justify.

As a mere story, founded on the Revolution of '89, it excels in terseness, vividness, and interest any romance of Alexandre Dumas on the same period; and at the same time it includes attractive moral elements, of which Dumas never had the slightest conception. Were it not that the romance is artistically constructed, demanding some exercise of mind on the reader's part to be thoroughly appreciated, there seems to be no reason why its popularity should not have outrun that of every "sensational" novel of the time, and have taken by storm the public which reads Reynolds and Miss Braddon, as well as the public which reads Thackeray, Bulwer, and Charles Reade. Yet "A Tale of Two Cities" is hardly known by thousands who have "Pickwick" and "Nickleby" almost by heart; and among these thousands are many intelligent as well as many unintelligent read-

ers of Dickens. The man or woman is to be envied who reads this "Tale of Two Cities" for the first time, as it has every quality of interest calculated to stir the dullest imagination, and stimulate the most jaded heart. In the style and treatment of the story there is also present that element of the serious grotesque, mounting at times to the *gigantesque*, which fascinates us in the romances of Victor Hugo.

The characters are generally subordinated to the incidents, yet the story is still rich in various characterization. Dr. Manette, his daughter Lucie, and the Defarges; Miss Pross, and Solomon her brother; Jerry Cruncher, — not forgetting his distressed wife and hopeful son; Mr. Stryver and Sydney Carton; and the sleek, sneering, cruel, voluptuous, blandly inhuman Marquis, abhorred by everybody, and specially abhorred by his nephew, who is in the line of succession to his rank and land, — a rank degraded by crime, and land blasted by infamous exactions on its tenants

to pay the debts of profligacy and riot; — all these are indisputable characters, each having an individual interest. It may be said, however, that Charles Darnay, the philanthropic nephew of the monster aristocrat, a man who becomes the central object of interest in the story, the lover and husband of Lucie Manette, who wins the greatest blessing that life affords, a tender and intelligent wife, in whom affection rises to the height of genius, is drawn with the faintest colors of the artist's pencil. Brave, honorable, noble as he is, his qualities are didactically rather than dramatically expressed, and one feels that he is insufficiently individualized when his prominence among the characters is considered. Still, the particular persons of the tale, whether attractive or repulsive, whether strongly or feebly delineated, are all drifted to and fro in the storm of events, representing the uprising of an oppressed people, blind and mad in selecting both its favorites and victims. In this revolutionary tempest Darnay and his wife, with

work itself, he says, that " its portrayal of the noble-natured castaway makes it almost a peerless book in modern literature, and gives it a place among the highest examples of literary art. . . . The conception of this character shows in its author an ideal of magnanimity and of charity never surpassed. There is not a grander, lovelier figure than the self-wrecked, self-devoted Sydney Carton, in literature or history; and the story itself is so noble in its spirit, so grand and graphic in its style, and filled with a pathos so profound and simple, that it deserves and will surely take a place among the great serious works of the imagination."

The only remark to be made in qualification of this eulogy is, that Carton's failure in life had made him not only indifferent to life, but heartily disgusted with it; there was no prospect of possible self-amendment rising before his eyes to check in the least his design of self-immolation; and he seized on the heroic form of suicide, presented to him by the dis-

tress of the woman he loved, as a means at once of blessing her existence and of extinguishing his own.

The Paris scenes in this "Tale of Two Cities" are more vivid and impressive than those which occur in London, yet the English incidents are not without special merit and interest. Most English novelists have exerted their talents in describing legal trials, affecting the lives or fortunes of their leading personages. Perhaps the account, in Warren's "Ten Thousand a Year," of the trial by which Tittlebat Titmouse wins the estates of Mr. Aubrey, is not the least exciting of the incidents of that novel, even to unprofessional readers; and Wilkie Collins so delights in this method of provoking curiosity that a suspicion prevails that he pays heavy fees to eminent lawyers to guide him in matters of law, when, as in "Man and Wife" and "The Law and the Lady," much of the interest depends on the decisions of judges, and the verdicts of juries. Dickens delights both in the comic

happen at the right moment to attract the party in power. The most remarkable individual of the whole class was Lord Thurlow, who reached the highest positions in his profession by sheer impudence, rather than by true commanding force of character; and Stryver is Thurlow *razeed*, but still starting out on the same path which eventually led his model to political and judicial eminence. Thurlow, when he needed the law he lacked, had many jackals to hunt it up for him; Stryver, as we know him, has only one, Sydney Carton, and Sydney really gains every case which gives reputation to his employer, by his power of extracting "the essence from a heap of statements,"—of getting at the very pith and marrow of every subject brought before his keen and powerful intellect. Thurlow was famous for the contemptuous way in which he spoke to and of his assistants. Among these were John Scott, who afterwards became Lord Chancellor Eldon, and the Welsh lawyer who afterwards became

Lord Chief Justice Kenyon. "Taffy," he once said to the latter, "you are obstinate, and give no reasons; now Scott is obstinate, too, but he gives reasons, and dashed bad ones they are." Stryver holds a similar tone of insolent superiority to Carton. William (now generally known as Sir William) Jones wrote to Burke in February, 1783, that it would be madness in the Whigs to continue Thurlow in office. "If you remove him," he says, "and put the seal in commission, his natural indolence is such that he will give you little trouble, because he will give himself none; but if he continues among you he will support all those whom you condemn," and "condemn all the measures which you may support." He calls him a Caliban, hating the human species generally, but particularly hating the best specimens of it, like the Marquis of Rockingham.

Dickens does not tell us that Stryver attains to the august position that Thurlow reached; but the brute element in him, the

Caliban lowness of sentiment and ferocity of disposition, is clearly indicated; and when this is accompanied with sufficient strength and breadth of brain to "intellectualize" the animal fierceness which underlies it, no legal lion of the Stryver kind will fail of finding jackals of the Carton kind to furnish him with precedents which he may be too indolent to collect, or arguments which he may be too incompetent to originate. Meanwhile Stryver's inalienable native gifts, his face of brass and tongue of thunder, his pushing, elbowing, unscrupulous way of forcing himself into prominence, regardless of honor and incapable of shame, insures him a success from which sensitive minds and hearts, however richly endowed by nature and culture, would shrink away abashed, considering such success the greatest of calamities.

Much might be said of Jerry Cruncher, one of the queerest of Dickens's humorous creations. By day he is an odd-job-man, an occasional porter and messenger, with his

stool outside the door of Tellson's Bank; by night he is a resurrectionist, or, as he puts it, an "honest tradesman." When Mr. Lorry discovers his unlawful calling, and suddenly asks him, "What have you been besides a messenger?" Jerry replies, after some cogitation, "Agricultooral character!" His objection to the penalties of high treason — the hanging, quartering, etc. — is that they interfere with his nightly agricultural pursuits. "It 's hard in the law to spile a man," he says; "it 's hard enough to kill a man; but it 's wery hard to spile him, sir." His final speech to Mr. Lorry, in which he half justifies the profession he nevertheless promises to abandon, is a very curious piece of rhetoric. After he is told that he disgraces Tellson's by being engaged in such an occupation, Jerry retorts that there are two sides of viewing the matter: "There might be medical doctors at the present hour a picking up their guineas where a honest tradesman don't pick up his fardens — fardens! no, nor yet his half fardens — half

fardens! no, nor yet his quarter — a banking away like smoke at Tellson's, and a cocking their medical eyes at that tradesman on the sly, a going in and going out to their own carriages — ah! equally like smoke, if not more so. Well, that 'd be imposing, too, on Tellson's."

Mr. Cruncher, after sojourning a year in France, has learned some new ideas of the sanctity of human life, and of the sanctity of human bodies after life has departed from them. "A man don't see," he says, "all this here a goin' on dreadful round him, in the way of subjects without heads, dear me, plentiful enough fur to bring the price down to porterage and hardly that, without havin' his serious thoughts of things." The prayers of his wife, which he formerly called "floppin' agen the business to that degree as is ruinating — stark ruinating!" and which he was accustomed to interrupt by throwing at her whatever heavy articles of boots or brushes happened to be conveniently at hand, now, in his

French experience of the Reign of Terror, seemed to acquire a value which he heretofore would have repudiated. Referring to Lucie and her children, he declares to Miss Pross: "Them poor things well out o' this, never more will I do it, never no more!" And if he fails to escape with his life, he is anxious that Miss Pross — who knows nothing of his feats as a resurrectionist, or of his interference with his wife's prayers — shall have his words "took down, and took to Mrs. Cruncher through yourself — that wot my opinions respectin' flopping has undergone a change, and that wot I only hope with all my heart as Mrs. Cruncher may be a flopping at the present time. . . . Forbid it," Mr. Cruncher proceeded, "with additional solemnity, additional slowness, and additional tendency to hold forth and hold out," as "anything wot I have ever said or done should be wisited on my earnest wishes for them poor creeturs now! Forbid it, as we should n't all flop (if it was any ways conwenient) to get 'em out of this dismal

risk! Forbid it, Miss! Wot I say, for-BID it!" Jerry seemed much delighted in so perfectly expressing his revived sense of the worth of religion, by capitalizing the second syllable of the last word but one. The reader is left to indulge the hope that Mr. Cruncher, once happily landed in England, will not only allow Mrs. Cruncher to "flop," but will "flop" with her, and bring up the unregenerated urchin, his son, to "flop" likewise.

The "Tale of Two Cities" has so much general vigor of style, and is so thoroughly penetrated by the writer's imagination, that it is superfluous to call attention to special felicities of diction, full as the narrative is of pointed and brilliant sentences. What particularly distinguishes it from Dickens's other romances is the enthralling interest of the story; and in this respect it is hardly exceeded by any novel published during the present century.

XV

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

On the first of December, 1860, Dickens began the publication, in "All the Year Round," of his novel of "Great Expectations," and closed it in the number of that weekly which appeared on the third of August, 1861.[1] His first intention, as in the case of "The Old Curiosity Shop," was to write a short sketch or story for the periodical he edited. Forster had suggested to him that he should try something in his old way, — something which would recall to the public his youthful achievements in humorous scenes and characterizations. Dickens replied: "For a little piece I have been writing — or am writing — for I hope to finish it to-day — such a very fine, new, and grotesque idea has opened upon me,

[1] It was then published as a book in three volumes, and inscribed to Mr. Chauncey Hare Townsend.

that I begin to doubt whether I had not better cancel the little paper, and reserve the notion for a new book. You shall judge as soon as I get it printed. But it so opens out before *me*, that I can see the whole of a serial revolving on it, in a most singular and comic manner."

This grotesque idea was, doubtless, the relation established between Pip and Magwitch, which might easily have been narrated in a few charming pages, such as those in which he had disposed of the germs of many other romances, in the series of essays, sketches, and portraitures of life, which he was then writing under the general title of "The Uncommercial Traveller." But the idea of an innocent boy, establishing unconsciously an immense influence over the mind of a hunted felon, simply by giving him that assistance which he dared not refuse, haunted Dickens's imagination until he gathered round it a whole new world of characters and incidents. He thought at first that it might furnish the materials for a monthly serial, in twenty numbers, like

"Dombey and Son," and "Little Dorrit"; but the falling off in the circulation of "All the Year Round" induced him to publish it in that weekly, and confine it to the dimensions of "A Tale of Two Cities." It is doubtful if he could have sustained himself in making the story double its present length. As it is, nothing could be better of its kind; but the atmosphere of Old Bailey and Newgate, which penetrates the whole tale, might have become insupportable in a romance as long as "Copperfield" and "Bleak House." The only method by which the interest could have been sustained would have been a forced extension and development of Pip's character, through scenes which might have followed the downfall of his "expectations," and which would have led him up to his eventual marriage with Estella in a less curt fashion than that which the romancer eventually employed.

To account for the conclusion of the story, as it now stands, where in a concluding chapter, "the heroine, after being married, re-

claimed, and widowed, is in a page or two made love to, and remarried to the hero," we must refer to a remonstrance from friends, which was more effectual in the case of Dickens, than that which protested against the death of Clarissa Harlowe, in the case of Richardson. Carlyle was among the persons who listened to the reading of advanced sheets of the story, and on one occasion, at a meeting of friends in Dickens's house, called, in his boisterous, laughing way, for more of that "Pip nonsense"; and Bulwer Lytton was so strongly opposed to the conclusion of the story as originally written, that Dickens reluctantly altered it. "I have changed the end of 'Great Expectations,'" he wrote to Forster, "from and after Pip's return to Joe's, and finding his little likeness there. Bulwer, who has been, as I think you know, extraordinarily taken by the book, so strongly urged it upon me, after reading the proofs, and supported his view with such good reasons, that I resolved to make the change. You shall have

it when I come back to town. I have put in as pretty a piece of writing as I could, and I have no doubt the story will be more acceptable through the alteration."

The original closing chapter left Pip a solitary man, as much estranged from Estella as he was from all the persons connected with her and his "great expectations." He returns to England, after an absence of eight years, and finds that Joe and Biddy, happily married, have given his name to their son. He learns that Estella, in marrying Drummle, has endured every outrage that could be inflicted by such a husband's pride, cruelty, and meanness; that she was relieved from her hated bonds by a merciful kick, bestowed upon him by a nobler brute, namely, a horse that he had ill-treated; and that she was now married to a Shropshire doctor, who had witnessed and resented, during his professional visits to her dying husband, the outrages that he heaped upon her to the last. Pip is also informed that she and the doctor are living

comfortably on her personal fortune. Then come the concluding sentences of the tale. "I was in England again—in London, and walking along Piccadilly with little Pip—when a servant came running after me to ask would I step back to a lady in a carriage who wished to speak to me. It was a little pony carriage, which the lady was driving; and the lady and I looked sadly enough on one another. 'I am greatly changed, I know; but I thought you would like to shake hands with Estella, too, Pip. Lift up that pretty child and let me kiss it!' (She supposed the child, I think, to be my child.) I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice and in her touch she gave me assurance that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be."

This was a natural and artistic conclusion of the story; but Bulwer insisted that Pip should not be left alone in desolate bachelor-

hood; that he should marry Estella. It must be confessed that Dickens contrived to give an unprepared, unexpected, and inartistic ending to the romance, satisfying to Bulwer and to ordinary readers of novels, because it promised a marriage between the hero and the heroine; but how dreary, how sepulchral is this mating of hearts, never intended to be matrimonially joined! Better to have left Pip, an experienced merchant, emancipated from all his old delusions, and leading his little namesake by the hand along Piccadilly, than to have married him to the lady who looked out upon him from her pony carriage as she drove by. Estella had deliberately used her charms for the purpose of winning his heart only to torture it; she had deliberately married a dolt and a brute for money; and she should have been left to the Shropshire doctor, who had softened all the heart she possessed by defending her from the death-bed malignity of her savage husband. Pip, educated into a man of affairs, who had learned the

value of the affections he had foolishly sacrificed in his green youth, should also have been left, as Dickens intended to leave him, calmly surveying the woman who had awakened in his youthful breast the passion of love only to deceive it, merely as a matron in whom he hoped calamity had developed a heart never revealed to him.

There is much of Dickens's best writing in "Great Expectations." The characterization is forcible even when it is least attractive. Thus the weird, ghostly Miss Havisham has more power expended on her than she deserves. Orlick is a savage of the same race as Hugh, in "Barnaby Rudge," but represented as more brutal than his prototype. A broad-shouldered, loose-limbed, swarthy, sullen, hulking ruffian, who "slouches into his work as he slouches out of it," his great physical strength is guided by a low cunning only to the gratification of a low malignity, and he is thoroughly dehumanized in the process by which he is strongly individualized.

Magwitch is a criminal of another type, having in him human elements of gratitude and love; and his own account of his miserable life has a rude fervor and pathos which are indescribably affecting. He condenses his biography in what he calls "a mouthful of English," namely, "in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. . . . I first became aware of myself down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living. Summun had run away from me — a man — a tinker — and he 'd took the fire with him, and left me wery cold."

How did he know his name was Magwitch? "Much as I know 'd the birds' names in the hedges to be chaffinch, sparrer, thrush. I might have thought it all lies together, only as the birds' names come out true, I supposed mine did. So far as I could find, there warn't a soul that see young Abel Magwitch, *with as little on him as in him*, but wot caught fright at him, and either drove him off or took him up. I was took up, took up, took

up, to that extent that I reg'larly grow'd up took up."

The narrative that succeeds is a compact account of the way in which the criminal classes are constantly recruited by swarms of neglected or abandoned children. Compeyson, the greater rogue of the two, plays an important part in the story, but he is felt rather by the effect his villainy produces on the character and fortunes of others, than by his own personality. The mother of Estella and wife of Magwitch, the murderess whom Mr. Jaggers releases from the grasp of justice, and curiously enough chooses for his housekeeper, completes the criminal group; though there is not a felon lounging around Mr. Jaggers's office who is not thoroughly individualized by a few brief, discriminating touches, from the red-eyed little Jew, "performing a jig of anxiety under a lamp-post, and accompanying himself in a kind of frenzy with the words, 'O Jaggerth, Jaggerth, Jaggerth!' " to the shuffling, one-eyed, weeping

Mike, who always seems to have one member of his interesting family up for larceny or burglary, and who is always prepared with a witness ready to swear, "in a general way, anythink."

Mr. Jaggers himself is one of Dickens's most felicitous characterizations in the law department of what we have called Dickensland. It is astonishing that his limited experience as a reporter, and as an apprentice in an attorney's office, should have furnished him with so many sharply defined types of the English lawyer, through all the grades of the profession, from Sampson Brass, in "The Old Curiosity Shop," all the way up to the bland Lord Chancellor who figures so gracefully in "Bleak House." He introduces scores of lawyers into his various romances, and shows a superficial knowledge at least of the jargon which distinguishes their language from the English language, and of the moral qualities which distinguish their legal nature from ordinary human nature; but he also

discriminates clearly between the various classes into which the profession is divided; and while preserving the general features of each class, sharply individualizes every person included in it, — that is, every person who seems deserving of a place in his gallery of original characters.

Thus Stryver, in "A Tale of Two Cities," belongs, like Jaggers, to the class of domineering legal bullies, and they might, on a superficial observation, be considered as pretty much alike; but, as represented by Dickens, they are very far apart in individual character, and cannot be confounded by any reader whose imagination has once been stamped with the image of either. The variation comes in great part from the fact that the idea, purpose, and atmosphere of the two romances are widely different. Stryver comes into "A Tale of Two Cities" chiefly as the advocate of an honest man accused of high treason; Jaggers comes into "Great Expectations" as the legal centre of a story which is satu-

rated with crime, a story where the criminal or worthless characters are in a majority, and where the innocent persons are all involved in a mesh of contradictions, arising from low villainies of which they are the victims. The offences in the one romance are political, — technical crimes which are universally known to be often the highest expression of noble virtues. In the other, the crimes are such as all civilized mankind repudiates, and the perpetrators of which are persons who can be saved from death or transportation only by the interposition of such lawyers as Mr. Jaggers, exerting their force and ferocity, their ingenuity and knowledge of technical forms, on behalf of the criminal's "legal rights."

Mr. Jaggers is, indeed, the very impersonation of the Old Bailey advocate, — the guardian angel, or at least the protecting genius, of all unfortunate gentlemen afflicted with irresistible tendencies to theft, arson, forgery, and homicide, standing firmly between them and

the gallows (provided always that they have previously "seen Wemmick"), and inspiring the whole swell mob of rascaldom with the well-founded conviction that "Jaggers can do it, if it is to be done." He "always seems to me," says his clerk, Wemmick, "as if he had set a man-trap, and was watching it. Suddenly — click — you 're caught!" A poor outcast woman, comforting another outcast, whose "Bill" has got into trouble about some matter of housebreaking, says to her, "Jaggers is for him, 'Melia, and what more *could* you have?" Indeed, there is hardly in literature a more finished specimen of the legal bully, perfect in the art of hectoring witnesses, terrifying judges, and bamboozling juries.

Even when there is no case to be tried he cannot get rid of the contentiousness of mind and manner he has acquired in the criminal courts. In private conversation, where no point is to be gained, he refuses to admit anything, and cross-examines everything and everybody. When he drops into the village ale-house to

inquire after Pip, and inform him of his "great expectations," he cannot resist, before proceeding to business, the tempation to demolish poor Mr. Wopsle, who is reading, in his grandest elocutionary tones, to a wondering audience, a thrilling newspaper account of "the last highly popular murder." By a few crushing Socratic interrogatories, as insolent as they are searching, he cross-examines that village luminary into utter silence and insignificance, so that even the rustics around the tavern fire, over whom he has long domineered, feel and see that he is utterly discomfited by this intruding stranger with the big head, deep-set eyes, and bushy black eyebrows, who lowers upon him from the back of the settle on which he is contemptuously leaning.

Throughout the book, Mr. Jaggers appears impregnable in every defensive position he takes, and overwhelming whenever he assumes the offensive. He penetrates into the heart of every person with whom he comes in contact or collision, while he himself remains impen-

etrable. Even Dickens only catches glimpses here and there of his inner self. The one occasion in which he exhibits feeling is that in which Pip implores him to state the facts regarding the parentage of Estella, and then he only gives the information in the form of an imagined case. Both he and Wemmick are so much mortified that they have been betrayed into an expression of sentiment which they consider unprofessional, that they become hard and harsh toward each other, and are only prevented from falling into a quarrel by the opportune arrival of Mike, who enters to announce that his eldest daughter is arrested on suspicion of theft. Wemmick detects a tear "twinkling in his eye," and asks him roughly, "What do you come snivelling here for?" "A man can't help his feelings," pleads Mike. "His what?" Wemmick savagely exclaims; "say that again!" Then Mr. Jaggers advances, points to the door, and, in a voice of thunder, bids this father of an unfortunate family to leave the office. "I 'll have no feelings here,"

he says; "get out." And Pip observes that, after Mike humbly withdraws, "Mr. Jaggers and Wemmick appeared to have reëstablished their good understanding, and went to work again with an air of refreshment upon them, as if they had just had lunch."

But Wemmick, the clerk of this redoubtable Bobadil of the law, has a domestic side to his character, which he carefully ignores the moment he enters the office. He has a small gothic cottage at Walworth which he calls a castle, and which is approached through a maze of back lanes, ditches, and little gardens, where he keeps a deaf old imbecile father in perfect comfort. In inviting Pip to supper, he mentioned among the viands he could give him, a cold roast fowl which he had from a cook's-shop. "I think it's tender," he remarks, "because the master of the shop was a juryman in some cases of ours the other day, and we let him down easy. I reminded him of it when I bought the fowl, and I said, 'Pick us out a good one, old Briton, because if we had

chosen to keep you in the box another day or two, we could easily have done it.'" And then he adds, addressing Pip, "You don't object to an aged parent, I hope! Because I have an aged parent at my place." The courtship of Wemmick to Miss Skiffins, culminating as it does in an appropriate marriage, very satisfactory to the "aged parent" to whom Miss Skiffins does not object, affords an opportunity for two or three scenes all alive with comically grotesque humor. Mr. Wemmick, after the wedding, warns Pip not to mention the circumstance to Mr. Jaggers. "He might think my brain was softening," says the happy husband; whereas the softening, as he knew, was really in the region of the heart, an organ systematically ignored in the law office of Mr. Jaggers.

Joe Gargery is one of a large class of characters which Dickens delighted to create,— men in whom solid integrity of heart and conduct can find no adequate expression through the brain and the tongue. Generally the tongue

is but too glib in uttering fine sentiments and ideas which have no root in feeling or character; if a man has nothing really to say, he finds little difficulty in saying it fluently, coherently, and charmingly; and no hypocrite, conscious or unconscious, would suffer from the impediments which obstruct the utterance of the stalwart Joe, when his great heart stumbles over the usual phrases of affection or disinterestedness in a sort of hopeless confusion. His brain can only stutter when his heart swells to its utmost capacity; and his favorite expression "which I meantersay," is more eloquent than the lucid sayings of less simple and noble natures.

Dickens was so captivated by Joe Gargery that he undertook the task of devising a new language for him, governed by a novel grammar, and with rules for construction of sentences which must naturally surprise the student of Blair, Kaimes, Campbell, or Whately. The creator of Joe felt that Christian civilization was based on the real existence of persons

resembling Joe in kind; and that political, fashionable, literary, and scientific "society," adorned with any number of fluent, graceful, and highly cultivated men and women, would crumble unless sustained by sturdy workmen of whom Gargery is the type. The solid nobility of his nature is all the more apparent, when we reflect that the circumstances of his early life were almost as unpropitious as those of Magwitch. In apologizing to Pip for his lack of schooling, this tongue-tied hero — a man whom Carlyle would have rapturously hugged as a realization of his ideal of silent fortitude — gives a pathetic account of his childhood and youth. "My father, Pip, he were given to drink, and when he was overtook with drink, he hammered away at my mother, most onmerciful. It were a'most the only hammering he did, indeed, 'xcepting myself. . . . Consequence, my mother and me we ran away from my father, several times; and then my mother she 'd go out to work, and she 'd say, 'Joe,' she 'd say, 'now, please God,

you shall have some schooling, child,' and she 'd put me to school. But my father were that good in his hart that he could n't abear to be without us. So he 'd come with a most tremenjous crowd and make such a row at the doors of the houses where we was, that they used to be obligated to have no more to do with us and to give us up to him. And then he took us home and hammered us. Which, you see, Pip, were a drawback on my learning."

Joe, under these circumstances, was set hard to work to support the drunken father; and "I kep' him," he adds, "till he went off in a purple'leptic fit. And it were my intentions to have had put on his tombstone that Whatsume'er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his hart. . . . As I was saying, Pip, it were my intentions to have had it cut over him; but poetry costs money, cut it how you will, small or large, and it were not done. Not to mention bearers, all the money that could be spared were wanted for my mother. She were in poor

'elth, and quite broke. She were n't long of following, poor soul, *and her share of peace come round at last.*" And he then goes on to give the reason why he submits to be so atrociously henpecked by his wife: "I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart, and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I 'm dead afeered of going wrong in the way of not doing what 's right to a woman, and I 'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t' other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself."

There is something almost sublime in the patience of this tender-hearted Vulcan, toiling day after day to support such a vixen Venus, neither expecting nor receiving the slightest recognition of his services, scorned, scolded, derided, and tormented by his termagant wife, and anxious only to save her brother Philip from the worst consequences of her senseless anger, when she was on "the rampage." What can be better than his ac-

count of his courtship and marriage? "She was a fine figure of a woman, Pip, — a little redness, or a little matter of bone, here or there, — what does it signify to me? . . . But when I got acquainted with your sister, it were the talk how she was bringing you up by hand. . . . If you could have been aware how small and flabby and mean you was, dear me, you'd have formed the most contemptible opinions of yourself. . . . And when I offered to your sister to keep company, and be asked in church at such times as she was willing and ready to come to the forge, I said to her, 'And bring the poor little child. God bless the poor little child,' I said to your sister, 'there 's room for *him* at the forge.'"

The essential pecularity and originality of Joe Gargery is, that he is contented with the mere exercise of good-will towards others. However unworthy may be the objects of his instinctive beneficence, and with whatever ingratitude his services may be requited, he is blind to everything except that the inborn

necessity of his nature has found vent in some blundering words, or efficient acts, which rudely express his benevolent feelings. He is as perfectly unconscious of merit in saying and doing these grand things as he is of merit in breathing, in swinging his arms at his forge, or in exercising any other bodily function. The more the character is studied, the more profound and beautiful in essence it is found to be.

Among the many characters of the book the uncle of Joe Gargery, the selfish, solemn, windy old donkey, Pumblechook, is deserving of special mention. He is asinine in soul, — a jackass who swindles humanity by assuming the human form, feloniously disregarding the gradual stages which the theory of development exacts in the structural transformation of species. Yet how delicious an ass Pumblechook is! Before Pip comes into his fortune, he is a tyrant; afterwards a sycophant; then again a hypocritical pretender; but always and ever an ass!

The different members of the Pocket family, who assemble in Miss Havisham's mansion, each toady anxious to excel the other in the grand object of being prominently named in that lady's will, are all well drawn; but we think there is one touch which is original in humorous nomenclature. Camilla is the sentimental lady among the numerous toadies gathered around the ghastly old maid; she suffers, according to her own statement, immense agonies, by night and by day, in thinking of the unhappiness of Miss Havisham; and she constantly appeals to a husband, kept in the background, to sustain her asseverations of the distressing effects on her physical system, occasioned by the intensity of her sympathies with the afflicted woman of whom she is ambitious to be the heir. The husband's name is Raymond, and she is legally Mrs. Raymond; but, as she is the dominant force in their domestic establishment, Dickens calls the husband Mr. Camilla. Is not this an entirely original stroke of humor, on a subject which has exer-

cised the humorists of all generations? Certainly no satirist that we call to mind, in indicating the (doubtless proper) subordination of the husband to the wife, has ever hit before on calling the male animal, Mr. Jane, or Mr. Mary, or Mr. Betsy. Then there is Miss Sarah Pocket, "a little dry, brown, corrugated old woman, with a small face that might have been made of walnut-shells, and a large mouth like a cat's, without the whiskers."

Mr. Wopsle is another marked character, — a man magnificently impotent, with a resounding voice that proclaims his imbecility over a wider area than is reached by the lungs of other fools, and whose performance of Hamlet forms one of the most richly humorous of the many scenes in which Dickens has ridiculed the theatre and the actors of his time. And, finally, there is the father of Herbert Pocket's Clara, old Bill Barley, a bed-ridden, covetous, swearing scamp, who seeks to allay the torments of the gout by copious libations of rum, flavored with pepper, and who is nat-

urally indignant that this fiery medicine does not have the curative qualities which might reasonably be expected of it.

But it is needless to call further attention to the felicity with which Dickens instantly individualizes his least important characters. His power of imaginative description is exhibited in this romance in two quite remarkable instances. The first is in the opening chapters, where the boy Pip comes into relation with the escaped convict; the second is the account of the defeated attempt, in the fifty-fourth chapter, to get the convict safely out of England. Both are masterly. The incidental remarks, arising naturally in the course of the story, are frequently striking, in their quaint humor or pathos. Thus: "Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself." Pip says: "I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born, in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against

the dissuading arguments of my best friends." Again: "I had seen the damp lying on the outside of my little window, as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief." Pip, as a boy, is surprised at the chalk scores against topers on the wall at the side of the door of the village tavern. "They had been there," he says, "ever since I could remember, and had grown more than I had. But there was a quantity of chalk about our country, and perhaps the people neglected no opportunity of turning it to account."

Everybody has heard of the rank which the great brewers of England obtain, from the husband of Dr. Johnson's Mrs. Thrale to the present Sir Something Bass. "I don't know," says Herbert Pocket, "why it should be a crack thing to be a brewer; but it is indisputable that while you cannot be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew." Indeed all the eminent brewers are invariably members of Parliament.

Bentley Drummle is described as a fellow so sulky, that "he even took up a book as if its writer had done him an injury," — a very admirable characterization of a whole class of critics. Pip fears that when Joe Gargery visits him in London, the rustic may be seen in his company by Drummle, a person for whom he has the most profound contempt. "So," he says, "throughout our life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of people whom we most despise."

This last remark may have been made before, but we remember no moralist who has given such pointed expression to a fact of universal experience. A large portion of the comedies and tragedies of life spring from our tendency to live beyond our means; and we live beyond our means merely to keep up a visiting acquaintance with persons whom we either positively hate, or for whom we have not the slightest sympathy.

The plot of "Great Expectations" is more ingeniously complicated than any other of

Dickens's novels except "Bleak House." As the story came out in weekly instalments, the general impression was that the concealed benefactor, bent on enriching Pip, was Miss Havisham; and when Magwitch, the convicted felon, announced himself as the person who had supplied the funds by which the blacksmith's apprentice had been converted into a fine young gentleman, he surprised most readers of the narrative as much as he surprised, horrified, and disgusted the recipient of his favors. When Dickens was once asked if those who met him daily in society guessed the secret of the story before it was disclosed, he answered that he had succeeded in putting every gentleman of his acquaintance on a false track, but that all the women with whom he conversed divined his purpose before the narrative had gone much beyond the introductory chapters, and were sure, in spite of his denials, that the escaped convict, whom Pip had supplied with a file and with meat and drink, was more likely to be his

benefactor, than the weird old maid, who used him as a plaything and as a victim.

When the novel is read as a whole, we perceive how carefully the author had prepared us for the catastrophe; but it required feminine sagacity and insight to detect the secret on which the plot turns, as the novel first appeared in weekly parts. It is a pity that some woman has not solved the "Mystery of Edwin Drood" — a mystery which the author carried with him to the grave — as easily as all women, according to Dickens, solved the mystery of Pip's "Great Expectations."

XVI

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

THIS romance was published in monthly numbers, extending from May, 1864, to November, 1865.[1] Dickens had conceived some of the characters and incidents of the story as far back as 1861. The feeling of improbability, which the least critical reader experiences in following the course of the narrative, is partly accounted for by the way in which the author picked up its materials. Almost everything in it is exceptional; but it may be said that portions which shock even the eager and ready credulity of the ordinary novel reader were founded on facts. In his wanderings by the banks of the Thames, he had seen handbills posted up, indicating that fishing for the

[1] In book form it appeared in two volumes published separately, the first containing a dedication to Sir James Emerson Tennent.

bodies of persons drowned in the river was a regular business of some degraded watermen; and his ready imagination suggested the characters of Hexam and Rogue Riderhood. At Chatham, while once walking with Leech, the artist, both were struck and amused by observing a father and son together, — "the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles." Charley Hexam was the extension of "the educated boy." Marcus Stone, the illustrator of "Our Mutual Friend," had discovered a queer character engaged in a strange trade, and carried Dickens to see him; and the result was the introduction into the story of Mr. Venus, preserver of animals and birds, and articulator of human bones. Mr. Riah, the patriarchal and benevolent old Jew, was made quite a prominent character in the book, because a Jewish lady, whom Dickens highly esteemed, considered that Fagin, in "Oliver Twist," was calculated to bring reproach on the Jewish religion as well as on the Jewish race. In repairing the wrong,

Dickens fell into the opposite error of making the scapegoat of Fascinating Fledgeby altogether too noble and august a creature for the business of discounting notes of hand at extravagant rates of discount.

The germ of the character of Rokesmith was contained in a letter to Forster, written some time before he concluded to make him the hero of "Our Mutual Friend." "I think," he wrote, "a man, young and perhaps eccentric, feigning to be dead, and *being* dead to all intents and purposes external to himself, and for years retaining the singular view of life and character so imparted, would be a good leading incident for a story." The Lammles and the Veneerings, who occupy such a prominent position in the satirical portions of the novel, were thus hinted at before he converted them into characters: "I have thought of a poor impostor of a man, marrying a woman for her money; she marrying *him* for *his* money; after marriage both finding out their mistake, and entering into a

league and covenant against folks in general." These were to be connected with some "perfectly new people. Everything was to be new about them. If they presented a father and mother, it seemed as if *they* must be bran new, like the furniture and the carriages — shining with varnish and just home from the manufacturers."

In combining these scattered memoranda into a romance, Dickens selected "the man who feigns himself dead" as the central figure. Starting with this improbability, he heaps improbability on improbability as the story proceeds to its improbable conclusion. Mr. Boffin's relation to Silas Wegg is improbable; his affectation of turning miser in order to disgust Bella Wilfer out of her worldliness is improbable; and it is more improbable still that John Harmon should marry Bella, seemingly under the name of Rokesmith, and then live with her for more than a year without announcing his real name and the fact of his large fortune. Even if Mr. Boffin's deception

was artistically justifiable up to the time Bella left his house and married his discharged clerk, the mystery should have been solved the moment she consented to become his wife; for she had shown all the disinterested affection that the most exacting lover should have required. Dickens, of course, tries to explain John's conduct by a reference to the eccentricity that had originally led him to feign being dead; but every test to which a woman's affection could be properly subjected was fulfilled when she abandoned luxury and fortune to share the fortunes of a poor clerk, ignominiously kicked out of his employment; and John Harmon's device of further testing her perfect confidence in his probity, by exposing it to the shock of seeing him arrested for murder, — the murder being committed by himself on himself, — is one of the most puerile contrivances, among the many puerile contrivances, to which writers of fiction have ever resorted. And all these elaborate improbabilities are intended to lead up to the melo-

dramatic, the theatrical, the "stagey" scene, in the fifteenth chapter of the fourth book, where Bella is overwhelmed with wonder at the disclosure of Mr. Boffin's plan of purifying her character from its worldly taint, and of making her as good as she is happy.

But all these improbabilities and inconsistencies, which would have exposed an ordinary novelist to merciless ridicule, are redeemed by the genius with which they are inseparably connected. Simply stated, — that is, divorced from Dickens's imaginative way of representing them, — the leading incidents and characters are almost as unreal as anything in the Arabian Nights, or in the fairy stories which are the delight of childhood. It seems impossible that they could be embodied in a novel of modern English society in the development of which thirty or forty thousand intelligent English readers should be eagerly interested for twenty months in succession, to the extent of rushing to secure the last number of "Our Mutual Friend," with news from Dickens's

dreamland, as they would hasten to secure the latest edition of "The Times," with news from more actual countries.

The reason is to be found in the fact that everything Dickens touched was so intensely individualized, that it became real to the heart and imagination when seemingly most unreal to the practical understanding. Why quarrel with Mr. Boffin, or Mrs. Boffin, or Mr. Silas Wegg, or Lizzie Hexam, or Mr. Venus, or Riderhood, or any of the other characters, who are altogether outside of our own actual experience, when we feel more interest in them, either as persons to love or detest, than we do in the men and women we daily meet? The improbability being granted, everything goes on smoothly. The wit and the humor, the comedy and the tragedy, the earnest faces, all alive with human meaning, which start up from the printed page and effect a lodgment in our imagination, reconcile us to all the incongruities which cool criticism relentlessly exposes. Criticism, for instance, may prove

that Mr. Boffin ought not to exist; but then the trouble remains that he *does* exist.

The late Mr. Tudor, a Boston ice merchant, took it into his head that he would raise tropical fruits and flowers on the rocky shores of the bleak Nahant. The spot was certainly ill selected; all horticultural critics predicted his failure, and doubted his success until the products were palpably placed before their eyes. In doing this, Mr. Tudor wasted much money which might have been more profitably employed; but he succeeded in realizing his whim. In a similar way, Dickens squandered much genius in settling that portion of Dickens-land included in the characterization of "Our Mutual Friend"; he might have selected a better place for colonizing the beings of his brain; but still the colonists are there, as much alive as any inhabitants of Canada or Australia, and as visible to the eye of the mind as Mr. Tudor's orange flowers and pine-apples were to the bodily eye. Both, in seemingly struggling against Nature, conquered her by going

through the preliminary process of obeying her; and they conquered, one in his garden, the other in his romance, by being regardless of expense in turning her away from her instinctive process of adapting her productions to the soils where they naturally grow.

Among all the delicious oddities that Dickens has portrayed, who exceeds Mr. Boffin, as supplemented by his wife? Throwing out of view the improbability of the thing, what can be more richly humorous than Mr. Boffin's relation with Mr. Silas Wegg, his "literary man, *with* a wooden leg, who professionally declines and falls, and as a friend drops into poetry"? From the first meeting of the patron with his hired man of letters, through all the varied incidents of their intercourse, to the time when Sloppy takes him out of the house, and pitches him, with a prodigious splash, into a scavenger's cart opportunely passing by the door, the scenes in which they appear are full of laughable matter, — an enjoyable combination of comedy and farce of which the

reader never tires. The negotiation between the contracting parties is conducted and concluded on the corner of the street, where Mr. Wegg has established his business of selling ballads, apples, oranges, nuts, and gingerbread, and where he has established imaginary relations with the tenants of the neighboring mansion, whom he christens Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker, and of whom he knows nothing. As to his stock in trade, "it gave you the face-ache to look at his apples, the stomach-ache to look at his oranges, and the tooth-ache to look at his nuts."

The interview with Mr. Boffin affords Wegg an opportunity to play off his cunning against the other's simplicity and ignorance. "All Print is open to you!" exclaims the admiring Mr. Boffin. "Why truly, sir, I believe that you could n't show me the piece of English Print that I would n't be equal to collaring and throwing." "On the spot?" asks Mr. Boffin. "On the spot," confidently

replies Mr. Wegg. The wonder to Mr. Boffin is increased by this avowal. "Here am I," he says, "a man without a wooden leg, and yet all Print is shut to me." In the bargain that is soon after concluded, that Mr. Wegg shall read to his employer at a crown a week, the former is at first inclined to ask more for reading poetry than for reading prose; "for," he declares, "when a person comes to grind off poetry night after night, it is but right he should expect to be paid for its weakening effect on his mind."

The ease with which Dickens individualizes a person, to whom he may devote only a page, is shown in the case of the hoarse man driving a donkey in a truck, with a carrot for a whip. He is introduced merely to give Wegg a lift, as he is trudging towards Boffin's Bower to keep his appoinment; and yet he is as distinctly a character as any in the novel. When Mr. Wegg, after "mellering his organ" with meat jelly, ham, and gin and water, opens the book he is to read for Mr.

Boffin's edification, he finds that it is "The Decline and Fall of the Roman," instead of the Russian Empire. "What's the difference?" Mr. Boffin asks. "The difference, sir?" Mr. Wegg falters in reply, for he knows nothing of the difference between the two. Suddenly, however, a bright thought occurs to him. "There you place me in a difficulty, Mr. Boffin; suffice it to observe that the difference is best postponed to some other occasion when Mrs. Boffin does not honor us with her company. In Mrs. Boffin's presence, sir, we had better drop it."

The conception of introducing such a man as Mr. Boffin to the treasures of literature and history, by beginning with such an author as Gibbon, is a grotesquely humorous idea which nobody but Dickens could have imagined. After Wegg closes his first reading, the proprietor of Boffin's Bower is left in a horror of amazement at the strange doings of "Commodious" and "Vittle-us." Wegg, he says, "takes it easy, but upon my soul to an

old bird like myself these are scarers. . . . I did n't think this morning there was half so many scarers in Print. But I'm in for it now!" Up to the time he makes the acquaintance of Bully Sawyers (Belisarius), he finds nothing, in nightly declining and falling with the Roman Empire and with Mr. Wegg which meets his own experience; and the separation of human nature in Print from human nature as he knows it by his own heart and his eyes, grows continually wider and more unaccountable. But his simplicity is accompanied with shrewdness: after Rokesmith has become his secretary, he sees through all the pretences by which a numerous variety of persons seek to plunder him; and Wegg, and Mrs. Lammle, and many others, find in the end that the Golden Dustman, by being intrinsically honest and kind-hearted, bears in his breast a talisman which enables him eventually to distinguish an honest man from a rogue, and a pretender to philanthropy from a real philanthropist.

Of Mrs. Boffin there can be but one opinion, or rather one feeling. Such a joyous, simple-hearted example of buxom beneficence, alive in every part of her soul and body, never before thrust her round, rosy, matronly face into the company of the imagined personages of a romance. A certain "vulgarity" in speech and manners, arising from her necessarily neglected education, cannot prevent us from exalting her far above any of the ladies she meets during the course of the narrative. The depth of motherly sentiment she felt for the poor, abandoned children of the curmudgeon whom she and her husband had faithfully served, is specially indicated by the delight she experiences in finding in Rokesmith the poor little John Harmon she had loved and protected as a boy, — a delight increased rather than diminished by the thought that she can give up all the wealth she so thoroughly enjoys to this equitable heir.

Before, however, she makes the discovery, she engages in a search for a desirable orphan

to adopt, which may remind her of her early favorite. The account of her hunting after this seemingly common urchin, allows Dickens an opportunity to introduce into his story such characters as the Rev. Mr. Milvey and his wife, Betty Higden, Sloppy, and the poor little Johnny, who is fixed upon as the most eligible among many orphans to be adopted, but who dies in the hospital before he can be transported to Mrs. Boffin's home. His death is very pathetically told. As Rokesmith and the doctor bend over the dying boy, they note some disquiet in his efforts to speak. "What is it?" they ask. Little Johnny answers, "Him! Those!" meaning by "him" the child with the broken leg, whose bed was next to his in the hospital; and by "those" the toys which were placed over his bed, and which he has seen his small neighbor eyeing with peculiar pleasure, before he moaned himself to sleep. After "the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards" have been softly transferred to their proper destination,

according to the faint pointing of his hand, he remembers Bella Wilfer, as a vision of beauty who had accompanied Mrs. Boffin in visits to his sick bed. Sustaining himself on Rokesmith's arm, he seeks the face of the lover of Bella with his lips, and says, "A kiss for the boofer lady!" And "having," in Dickens's words, "now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it." Is there not something exquisitely pathetic in this scene?

It is needless to say that all these proceedings fill with supreme disgust the soul of Mr. Boffin's literary man, *with* a wooden leg, who has vindicated his asserted capacity to collar and throw at sight anything which meets him in English Print, by his nightly struggles with the difficulties of Gibbon's prose. The sad ending of the hunt for an orphan gives him a corresponding pleasure. If, he sagaciously argues in his capacious mind, they wanted an orphan, why did they go beating about Brentford bushes in search of the article, when they had

one near at hand? "Am I not an orphan?" exclaims Mr. Wegg in the secure lodgment he has established in Boffin's Bower; "and what more can they want?" The fact that he has been an orphan for some fifty or sixty years only intensifies his sense of injury in being overlooked. Perhaps his prowling about the house, and poking among the mounds, in order to find some means of plundering his benefactor, may have been stimulated by the bad taste evinced by Mrs. Boffin in not immediately perceiving that in him she had an orphan, eager to be adopted, on whom her matronly affection might at once be exercised, without her wasting time in fruitless researches for an impossible ideal, directed to the discovery of a tenderer and more youthful specimen than he of the orphan variety of the human species.

John Harmon, who has appeared at the inquest which announces his own death, is connected with the family of the Wilfers by being connected with the Boffin family. As he

understands his father's will, the property is left to him provided he marries Bella Wilfer. He has no idea of gaining fortune by a marriage to a woman who does not love him; and after escaping from the ruffians who thought they had suceeeded in sending him to that world where fortune is of little importance, and discovering that the person killed is recognized as John Harmon, he concludes to preserve his incognito, and, as Rokesmith, to pay court to the unknown bride devised to him under the terms of the will. For this purpose he hires a room in poor Mr. Wilfer's shabby house, and becomes a secretary to Mr. Boffin. He is attracted by Bella Wilfer's beauty, in spite of the openness with which she expresses her horror of poverty, and her determination to make, under the patronage of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, a mercenary marriage; and he finally falls desperately in love with her, declares his love, and is contemptuously rejected.

He concludes to go away, leaving the Boffins in possession of his fortune, when Mrs.

Boffin, looking in upon him as he broods over the fire in his room, detects the lone, lorn, despairing look which the boy, John Harmon, had so often cast up to her motherly face, and she cries, "I know you, now! You 're John!" and drops fainting in the arms of her recovered favorite. From that time everything in the house is subordinated to the one purpose of enabling John to appear in a noble light to Bella, even at the expense of forcing good Mr. Boffin to assume the character of a miser, to become a regular "brown bear," a "grizzly old growler,"—the benevolent old couple discussing every night how far Mr. B.'s growing insults to John Harmon, exhibiting that gentleman in the noblest attitude of self-respect mingled with forbearance, should succeed in gradually converting Bella into a disinterested woman, ready to surrender her hopes of wealth for a portionless union with the persecuted man she had all along really loved.

In the interim, John has frequent oppor-

tunities to show his superiority to the other men she meets. Before the time arrives of her leaving the Boffin mansion to be the wife of Mr. Boffin's discharged clerk, she has become acquainted with Lizzie Hexam, has been connected with other personages in the story, and, above all, has furnished the author with an opportunity to exhibit the whole Wilfer family.

As to the latter, it may confidently be said that Dickens, in none of his previous novels, had delineated a domestic group so rich in individual qualities and humorous contrasts, as that gathered under the humble roof of Reginald Wilfer, clerk of the great firm of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles,—represented, in this romance, by Mr. Veneering, who gathers "society" around his dinner table. Whenever a Wilfer appears in "Our Mutual Friend," you may, in Joe Gargery's phrase, "look out for larks." However unpromising his family may appear to R. Wilfer, and however much that little cherub's

heart may be wrung on leaving his quiet desk in the counting house for the absurd little hell which he calls his home, there can be no doubt that the reader profits by the miseries which the husband cheerfully endures.

Such a household! Mrs. Wilfer is a tall, angular, majestic woman, with her head tied up in a pocket-handkerchief knotted under her chin, and with a pair of thick, worn gloves ever on her hands, always mourning over the descent in station she had incurred in marrying R. W., and acting the part of Lady Macbeth to her liege lord in a manner that appalls that innocent gentleman, and makes him sometimes wish that she had married a person superior to him in rank; and his daughters are as distractedly afflicted with the disease of giddiness as his wife is with that of overpowering composure. The poor man finds his domestic content somewhat disturbed between the two; but Bella, the elder of the daughters, and the heroine of the story, though wilful, skittish, fretful, flighty, discon-

tented, and in every way aggravating, "with no more character," as she afterwards confesses, "than a canary bird," still loves her father, in a half-affectionate, half-compassionate way, while as contemptuous of her mother, when she assumes her Act of Parliament tone, as her pert younger sister, Lavinia, who loves nobody,—father or mother,—who domineers over everybody as far as she can, and who is specially tyrannical to a cast-off, slender-witted adorer of her elder sister, named George Sampson, whom she wills to hold in her toils until she can catch some more promising specimen of the male sex, with a larger income and a better brain.

From the time that Mrs. Boffin calls on Mrs. Wilfer, to carry Bella away to a happier home,—not however before "the craft, the secrecy, the dark, deep, underhanded plotting, written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance," have made Bella's mother shudder,—to the time when Bella, as Mrs. John Harmon, welcomes the whole family to her magnificent

mansion, — the Wilfers afford many delicious scenes, on which Dickens employs all the resources of his observation and humor. The father, the mother, the two daughters, are thoroughly individualized; and Bella, especially, is so perfectly represented, that we see and feel the very soul of the giddy girl, as it is whirled this way and that, — the levity of her character gradually giving way before an overmastering affection, which leaves her all the delightful spontaneousness of her original disposition, while every good quality in her nature is deepened and enlarged by it. The scene of her elopement and marriage is so narrated as to make every reader envy the happy husband.

Before this occurs, however, she has been the occasion of her lover's quietly making the noblest remark to be found in all Dickens's writings. After Bella has been closeted with Lizzie Hexam, has felt the beauty of her self-abnegation, and has cheered her by her maidenly sympathy, she says despairingly to John

Harmon, that she feels she is useless in this world. "No one," he replies, "is useless in this world, who lightens the burden of it for any one else." Is not here contained the very essence of practical philanthrophy? The little sentence is almost worthy of being blazoned, and placed among those scriptural texts in golden letters which we often see exhibited in Christian homes, where the exhortations to a Christian life are made into artistic ornaments of the rooms, preaching continually their benignant precepts to the eye and imagination.

Lizzie Hexam is a continuation of Little Nell, of Florence Dombey, of Agnes Wickfield, of Little Dorrit, of Lucie Manette. The circumstances differ, but the root of the character, self-sacrifice, is the same. Yet we can hardly call in their case by so austere a word as sacrifice, a self-denial which is prompted by a filial and family love so deep, that not to exercise it would produce intense misery in the affectionate hearts of which it is the spring of a healthy activity. Their self-sacrifice, in

short, is but a form of self-expression. The nature being what it is, any obstruction to its outlet would be the saddest misfortune it could experience. What we admire in their disinterestedness is something as real in their characters as that impulse which urges other daughters to disregard father, mother, and brothers, in acting out their own selfish instincts. Duty, indeed, has become with them an instinct; and they not only obey its obligations with a certain joy, but they are incapable of any remorse which is not connected with some fancied oversight of an occasion where it might have been more effectively exercised.

There are such young women scattered over the world; and it is the glory of Dickens that he has embodied their finest elements in ideal characters so attractive to the heart and the imagination, that to contemplate them has a direct tendency to increase the number of their actual representatives in common life.

The task that Lizzie Hexam sets to herself

is only more difficult than that of the other members of Dickens's saintly sisterhood, because she stands by a father who is engaged in the most repulsive and degrading of human occupations, and by a brother who is a selfish, ungrateful, conceited little snob, whose qualities require an affection almost divine to bear with for a moment. As the story goes on, Lizzie is called upon to combat a passion for Eugene Wrayburn, which further complicates her relation to her brother; for he urges her, for *his* advantage, to receive the attentions of his head master, Bradley Headstone, whom she instinctively abhors. The wretched youth thinks that his sister is obstructing his rise into respectability, by foolishly refusing a husband whom *he* has selected as a person who might benefit *him*. That his sister's soul and body are not at his service, to be disposed of in the best way to advance his interests, is an idea that Charley is at last indignantly compelled to admit; and it furnishes him, as he thinks, with a just reason for discarding her forever.

The tendency of self-sacrifice to generate the most odious forms of selfishness, when the objects of it are abject natures, who receive it as one of their rights, was never better illustrated than in the case of Lizzie Hexam and her whelp of a brother. If Lizzie had been a little more selfish, Charley would probably have grown up into a less despicable specimen of manhood, or rather mannishness.

Eugene Wrayburn is the culmination of a character which Dickens had repeatedly attempted to represent in some of his previous novels, — a dawdling, drawling young Englishman of the present day, born of aristocratic parentage, liberally educated, qualified in some degree for a profession, but still acting on the theatre of life as if, like the Duke of Orleans described by Saint-Simon, he had been "born bored." He is a consumer of cigars; a welcome visitor at dinner tables where he simply eats and yawns; and reaches a certain kind of social distinction by drawlingly preaching the doctrine of idleness which he somewhat

laboriously practices. His friend, Mortimer Lightwood, is of the same disposition, and is indeed much surprised by the business accidentally forced upon him by Mr. Boffin and Rogue Riderhood.

Both of these young gentlemen agree that if anybody would give them an opportunity really worth being energetic about, they would show energy; but as it is, they detest the name. "Am I," says Eugene, "to rush out into the street, collar the first man of a wealthy appearance I meet in the street, shake him, and say, 'Go to law upon the spot, you dog, and retain me, or I 'll be the death of you'? Yet that would be energy." Mr. Boffin afterwards tells him there 's nothing like work. "Look," he exclaims, "at the bees." Eugene treats this trite illustration somewhat in the style with which it had been previously played with by Harold Skimpole. "Conceding for a moment," argues Eugene, "that there is any analogy between a bee and a man in a shirt and pantaloons (which I deny), and that it is settled

that the man is to imitate the bee (which I also deny), the question still remains, what is he to learn? To imitate? Or to avoid? When your friends the bees worry themselves into that highly fluttered extent about their sovereign, and become perfectly distracted touching the slightest monarchical movement, are we men to learn the greatness of tuft-hunting, or the littleness of the Court Circular? I am not clear, Mr. Boffin, but that the hive may be satirical." Mr. Boffin replies that at all events they work. "Ye-es," Eugene disparagingly retorts, "they work; but don't you think they overdo it? They work so much more than they need — they make so much more than they can eat — they are so incessantly boring and buzzing at their one idea until Death comes upon them — that don't you think they overdo it? Are human laborers to have no holidays because of the bees? And am I never to have a change of air because the bees don't? Mr. Boffin, I think honey excellent at breakfast; but, regarded in the light of my

tyrannical schoolmaster and moralist, I protest against the tyrannical humbug of your friend the bee. With the highest respect for you."

What gives some tension to the vagrant faculties of this young aristocrat is his love for Lizzie Hexam. He pursues her without any clearly defined intention either of seducing or marrying her; but he feels that he is attracted to this exceptional maiden by a moral quality in her nature, which he had never before perceived in a woman, and which stirs in him all the latent goodness in the depths of his being. This had heretofore been crusted over by all those fopperies of indifference to everything and everybody, which give distinction to the youths enrolled as members of the aristocracy, who shed lustre on the vast kingdom of Boredom. Bradley Headstone, whom he goads into madness by his insults, pounds his coxcombry out of him by nearly depriving him of his existence. His rescue by Lizzie completes the reformation of his character. He marries her on his reviving sick bed, with the determina-

tion of living *for* her — of disregarding all the taunts of a "society" composed of the Veneerings, Podsnaps, and Tippinses, and of working resolutely for his living hereafter, like other self-respecting heroes of industry.

The tragic interest of the story centres in Bradley Headstone. This dogged, stolid schoolmaster of twenty-seven, the perfection of mediocrity, who conducts teaching by the latest light afforded by "the Gospel according to Monotony," bears under his decorous vest a heart capable of the deepest passion. Miss Peecher, the perfect model of a decorous schoolmistress, has an unselfish, unutterable tenderness toward this specimen of a perfect schoolmaster. In the natural order of things, Miss Peecher should have been married to Mr. Headstone. She certainly would have made him the most affectionate of wives, aiding him in all his schemes of rigidly training pupils to learn the externals of knowledge by the most repulsive methods under which knowledge can be bullied into the juvenile

mind. They seem made for each other; but Mr. Headstone becomes inflamed with a mad passion for the sister of his cherished pupil. This is opposed, not merely by the repugnance of the woman on whom his heart is set, but by the insolent rivalry of Eugene Wrayburn.

The slow, accumulated results of baffled passion in a dogged nature, ulcerating the heart and depraving the will, until the apparently frigid schoolmaster, attentive merely to the details of his monotonous work, ends in being a murderer, are described by Dickens with great power of psychological observation and analysis; but the general reader has a feeling that it would have been better to exert the same power on a more attractive subject. The tragedy of Dickens is always less attractive than his pathos, although perhaps he throws more of his imaginative force into the delineation of criminal natures than into the exhibition of souls working under the influence of humane and Christian sentiments.

Dickens crowds his stories with such a variety of characters that it is difficult to do justice to them all. For example, there is in the romance of "Our Mutual Friend" a certain character called Miss Jenny Wren (*née* Fanny Cleaver), the dolls' dressmaker, and manufacturer of ornamental pincushions and penwipers, who is one of the quaintest of all the creations of Dickens's humorous imagination and sensitive heart. Were she not so thoroughly individualized and so thoroughly English, there is something on the poetical side of her character which might place her, as a creation, by the side of Goethe's Mignon. The poor, little, decrepit creature, with her beautiful face and luxuriant golden hair, working to support a hopelessly drunken father, and with sufficient force of will to keep him in some order as "the child" whom she scolds and protects; indulging in the wildest fantasies of imagination while engaged in her humble tasks; ever capable of helping others while seemingly making a pathetic appeal as

an object for others to help; shrewd in perception and tart in expression; with an inner world of mental experience, resembling the oddest fancies of those who dwell permanently in Wonderland, combined with outward circumstances to the last degree sordid, wretched, and unsatisfying, — this small, queer, deformed, bright-brained, good-hearted specimen of maiden humanity is really deserving of a prominent rank among the original creations of the poets and romancers of the century. The point and sparkle of her conversation, and the somewhat vixenish way in which she expresses her kind-heartedness, disdaining always to be pitied or to be assisted, only give a deeper sense of the pathetic beauty of a character, in which physical suffering is contemptuously ignored as long as the mind retains its power of thinking rapidly, and the heart its capacity of loving warmly.

How exquisite is the deformed girl's statement of the consolations of her hard lot. "I dare say," she musingly remarks to Lizzie

Hexham, "my birds sing better than other birds, and my flowers smell better than other flowers. For, when I was a little child, the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; *they were never in pain.* They were not like the children of the neighbors; they never made me tremble all over by setting up shrill noises, and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them, too! All in white dresses, and with something *shining on the borders and on their heads*, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long, bright, slanting rows, and say all together, 'Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!' When I told them who it was, they answered, 'Come and play with us!' When I said, 'I never play! I can't play!' they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down,

and said all together, 'Have patience, and we will come again.' Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together, a long way off, 'Who is this in pain!' And I used to cry out, 'Oh, my blessed children, it 's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light.'"

We confess to be unable to transcribe this without a suffusion in the eyes as we merely copy the passage; and with what sobbings, and blinding tears, must Dickens have written it! It is in unrhymed prose; but there are few more essentially poetic passages, compact of sensibility and imagination, in the verses of contemporary poets.

Take, again, a character of the extremely opposite kind, the resolute old maiden, Miss Potterson, who keeps the tavern of The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, situated on the very edge of the Thames River, where such persons as Riderhood and the father of Lizzie Hexam are most inclined to congregate. The

house is a drinking house; but she presides over it with an austerity, an autocracy, which would more properly become a secretary of a temperance society than a grim, good-hearted woman, who dispenses liquors of all kinds to the boatmen of the neighborhood. Mr. Evarts once said, in a humorous reference to the virtue of Vermont, that nobody could be admitted into its prisons without a certificate, testifying to his previous good moral character. Miss Potterson excludes, on the same principle, all tainted men from the privileges of her bar and parlor; and is specially careful in superintending and restricting the drinking of those gentlemen she allows to partake of her purl, flip, dog's-nose, and whatever other preparations of beer, sherry, or rum for which she has established a just reputation, admitted even by the police inspector, as an adept in concocting.

There is something comical in the meek obedience of her customers to her will and judgment. "Captain Joey," she says to one, "you have had as much as will do you good."

The grog-drinkers tell him, "You be guided by Miss Abby, Captain." Then after he has toddled home, she suddenly darts down on another, who had warmly joined with those who were for banishing the captain from the convivial society. "Tom Tootle," she says, "it 's time for a young fellow who 's going to be married next month to be at home and asleep. And you need n't nudge him, Mr. Jack Mullins, for I know your work begins early to-morrow, and I say the same to you." Ruffians, like Riderhood, become tame and sycophantic at her frown; and a prominent element in the plot proceeds from his accusing the father of Lizzie Hexam of "a skill in purwiding what he finds," — that is, of killing the persons whose dead bodies he picks up in the river. The result of this cruel insinuation on the mind of Miss Potterson is, not to admit into the sanctuary of her bar, with the privilege of imbibing her liquors, the scoundrel she knows, but to banish Gaffer Hexam from the select circle of her topers.

The satire of the novel gathers round the group assembled at the dinner table of Mr. Veneering. Neither he nor his wife seems qualified in any way to be connected with "society"; but the speculative merchant, sure in the end to be bankrupt, contrives to make himself eminently respectable by inducing a positive representative of mercantile power, like Podsnap, to come to his dinners. Mrs. Podsnap goes because her attendance enables "elderly osteologists," or critics in the matter of bones, to observe and admire her meagre shoulders, while she leaves her daughter to the mercies of such creatures as the Lammles, eager to marry her to the lowest specimen of human vermin on which Dickens had heretofore exercised his satirical talent, namely, the mean, false, base, "nasty" Mr. Fledgeby. The fun of the thing consists in the fact, that people are not so much invited to dine as that they invite each other to dine there, and despise and disregard the hosts whose rich viands they eat, and whose delicate wines they drink.

They politely endure the existence of Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, at the head and foot of the table; but they act as they would act at a tavern. They talk with each other, only acknowledging the giver of the feast by a few formal compliments.

Lady Tippins is the person who lends dignity to the assemblage by her rank, while she is at the same time the most obviously foolish, chattering, impoverished, impertinent old dowager that could be selected from the pauper members of the nobility of Great Britain. Dickens's great point is, that the charming Tippins, with her parrot beak and parrot tongue, and others like her, give the tone to English middle-class "society," and interpose by their opinions a sort of aristocratic barrier to prevent any gentleman, like Eugene Wrayburn, from forfeiting his caste by marrying below his rank. A full fourth of the book is devoted to a pitiless exposure of the false pretensions of what is called "society," and especially to a presentation of the unutterable unsatisfactoriness of

the boredom which obedience to the behests of "society" exacts.

We have said enough to show that in "Our Mutual Friend" the readers of Dickens had reason to congratulate themselves on a fresh and original exercise of his powers. But the circumstances under which much of it was written were very discouraging. He was repeatedly ill during its composition. In February, 1865, the complaint in his foot, which was the unheeded precursor of the disease of which he died, broke out, and deprived him, for the time, of his favorite method of disposing of all ills, moral and bodily, by long and rapid walks. At last he concluded to make a trip to France. "Work and worry," he wrote to Forster, "without exercise, would soon make an end of me. If I were not going away now, I should break down. No one knows as I know to-day, how near to it I have been."

In returning from his French journey, he was on the train which met with the accident, commemorated in his postscript-preface to

"Our Mutual Friend." On June 10, 1865, he wrote to Forster: "I was in the terrific Staplehurst accident yesterday, and worked for hours among the dying and the dead. I was in the carriage that did not go over, but went off the line, and hung over the bridge in an inexplicable manner. No words can describe the scene." Forster adds that Dickens never absolutely recovered from the nervous shock of that calamitous occurence. "I am curiously weak," he wrote later in the month; "weak as if I were recovering from a long illness. . . . I begin to feel it more in my head. I sleep well and eat well; but I write half a dozen notes, and turn faint and sick. . . . I am getting right, though still low in pulse, and very nervous. Driving into Rochester yesterday, I felt more shaken than I have been since the accident." Indeed, considering all the circumstances which tended to interrupt his writing, while engaged on "Our Mutual Friend," it is curious that there are so few evidences of what was the fact, that many chapters were

written "against the grain," and represented the forcing of his genius to do a work of which he tired before its completion.

A word should be said about the title of the novel, which occasioned much controversy during the period of its serial publication. Mr. Charles Folsom, the late accomplished librarian of the Boston Athenæum, a scholar under whose searching eye the manuscripts of some of the ablest historians and theologians of New England passed before they were committed to the press, and whose modest though valuable labors deserve a far higher acknowledgment and recognition than they have received, was especially distressed by the vulgarism of "Our Mutual Friend" being taken as a title by the most eminent of contemporary British romancers. After the first number of the book was issued, no man of letters could enter the library, without being accosted by Mr. Folsom, and implored to share his indignation at such an insult to the English language as Dickens had committed in substituting "mutual"

for "common" friend. The grand old gentleman, with his genial rosy face, and the bright, earnest scholarly eyes blazing at you through his gold-rimmed spectacles, made you feel for the moment that all the treasures of wit, humor, fancy, sensibility, and characterization contained in the novel were incurably vitiated by the grammatical inaccuracy under which they were all included. But Dickens had chosen the title four years before the first number was published, and adhered to it against all remonstrance and objection from English friends. He probably supposed that "Our Common Friend," however freed from the anathemas of grammarians, would not be so taking a title as the one he selected, open as it was to the obvious criticism of being a vulgarism of colloquial speech, unworthy of being chosen as the name of an extended work.

XVII

CHRISTMAS STORIES

I

THE Christmas Stories of Dickens occupy a high position in Christmas literature. Christmas day, indeed, was to him both a holiday and a holy day; a day given over to festivity and at the same time consecrated to beneficence; a day in which joy was associated with the diffusion and multiplication of joy, so that the pleasure of each person was increased in proportion to the number of persons that participated in it; a day, in short, in which the jollities of life joined hands with the charities, and universal good cheer stood forth as an expression of the spirit of universal love. He has put much eating and drinking into the stories, but then he christianizes eating and drinking, and contrives to make the stomach in some odd way an organ of the soul. Into

the humblest fare on the tables of the poor he infuses a precious something which gives it a flavor that the master cooks of the world, the artists of gastronomy, have toiled after in vain. The glutton idolizes meat and drink; Dickens idealizes them. There are no actual dinners which have the relish which comes from eating, in imagination, Bob Cratchit's goose or Toby Veck's tripe.

"The Christmas Carol" was published in December, 1843. Its success was not only great with the general public, but it elicited from strangers to Dickens scores of private letters, testifying to the delight with which it was read at their firesides. Lord Jeffrey wrote to him in that style of panegyric with which, in his old age, he was accustomed to indulge while delivering himself over to the pleasurable feelings excited by new books, with a complete forgetfulness of the disparaging acuteness of his criticisms when he was editor of the "Edinburgh Review." "Blessings on your kind heart!" he exclaims; "you should be

happy yourself, for you may be sure you have done more good by this little publication, fostered more kindly feelings, and prompted more positive acts of beneficence, than can be traced to all the pulpits and confessionals of Christendom since Christmas, 1842." Thackeray declared the book to be "a national benefit, and, to every man and woman who reads it, a personal kindness."

The oddity of the supernatural machinery by which Scrooge is converted from a hard-fisted old hunks into an open-handed philanthropist corresponds to the oddity of the miracle; the animation of the humorous scenes continually suggests the most hilarious Christmas festivity; and the style has the abruptness, the jerkiness, the sudden twists and turns of rapid and eager conversation. The description of the Cratchit family at dinner is one of the most delightful things in all of Dickens's works. Indeed, the author, while writing the tale, seems, like Decker's Old Fortunatus, to have been "all felicity, up to the

brims!"[1] The heartiness of the good-will to all mankind which penetrates the story is magnetic; the least sympathetic reader catches it as by infection; and among the hundreds of thousands who have read the book, very few are those who have closed it without echoing Tiny Tim's prayer, "God bless us, every one!" with an added special blessing on the humane creator of Tiny Tim.

"The Chimes, a Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In," was published towards the close of 1844. It was written in Genoa, and was intended as a plea for the poor. Carlyle's writings had taught Dickens to dislike political economy, which he never understood, as the

[1] In a letter to C. C. Felton, when sending a copy of the *Christmas Carol*, Dickens writes: "Over which *Christmas Carol* Charles Dickens wept and laughed and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner in the composition; and thinking whereof, he walked about the black streets of London fifteen and twenty miles many a night when all the sober folks had gone to bed. . . . It is the greatest success, as I am told, that this ruffian and rascal has ever achieved."

Dismal Science; and he distrusted all governmental plans, based on the principles of political economy, for the relief and elevation of the so-called "lower classes." He seems to have been in a fever of philanthropic enthusiasm whilst composing this Christmas story. "I am," he writes to Forster, "in regular ferocious excitement with the 'Chimes'; get up at seven; have a cold bath before breakfast; and blaze away, wrathful and red-hot, until three o'clock or so: when I usually knock off (unless it rains) for the day. . . . I am fierce to finish in a spirit bearing some affinity to those of truth and mercy, and to shame the cruel and the canting." [1]

As he went on writing, the tale more and

[1] "I have tried to strike a blow upon that part of the brass countenance of wicked Cant, when such a compliment is sorely needed at this time, and I trust that the result of my training is at least the exhibition of a strong desire to make it a staggerer. If *you* should think at the end of the four rounds (there are no more) that the said Cant, in the language of *Bell's Life*, 'comes up piping,' I shall be very much the better for it." — Charles Dickens to Douglas Jerrold.

more took possession of his mind, and was hardly out of his thoughts for a moment. "This book," he again writes to Forster, "has made my face white in a foreign land. My cheeks, which were beginning to fill out, have sunk again; my eyes have become immensely large; my hair is very lank; and the head inside the hair is hot and giddy. Read the scene at the end of the third part, twice. I would n't write it twice for something. . . . To-morrow I shall begin afresh (starting the next part with a broad grin, and ending it with the very soul of jollity and happiness); and I hope to finish by next Monday at latest. . . . I hope you will like the little book. Since I conceived, at the beginning of the second part, what must happen in the third, I have undergone as much sorrow and agitation as if the thing were real; and have wakened up with it at night. I was obliged to lock myself in yesterday, for my face was swollen at the time to twice its proper size, and was hugely ridiculous."

These passages, from his private letters, are a few among many proofs that Dickens realized his characters and situations so intensely, that his pathetic scenes drew from him more tears, and his comic scenes more laughter, than were recorded in the experience of his more susceptible readers. As to "The Chimes," he was so much impressed with the feeling of having done a great thing, that he passed over to England to read it to a private circle of his friends previously to its publication, and was rewarded for his trouble by "the grave attention of Carlyle, the eager interest of Stanfield and Maclise, the keen look of poor Laman Blanchard, Fox's rapt solemnity, Jerrold's skyward gaze, and the tears of Harness and Dyce." The peculiar earnestness of his purpose in writing the book is indicated by his remark to Forster, after having expatiated to him on Venice as "the wonder," "the new sensation" of the world. "Ah!" he added, "when I saw those places, how I thought that to leave one's hand upon the time, last-

ingly upon the time, *with one tender touch for the mass of toiling people that nothing could obliterate*, would be to lift one's self above the dust of all the Doges in their graves, and stand upon a giant's staircase that Samson could n't overthrow."

The story of "The Chimes" naturally excited much opposition among the classes satirized in the characters of Mr. Filer, Alderman Cute, and Sir Joseph Bowley. But Jeffrey was, as usual, enthusiastic in his admiration. "All the tribe of selfishness, and cowardice and cant, will hate you in their hearts, and cavil when they can; will accuse you of wicked exaggeration, and excitement to discontent, and what they pleasantly call disaffection! But never mind. The good and the brave are with you, and the truth also." Now, we may suppose that John Stuart Mill was a good and brave man, and that he had some love as well as perception of truth, yet certainly his opinion would have substantially agreed with that of Mr. Filer, so mercilessly

ridiculed for his opposition to improvident marriages among the poor. And Mill was also as warm a friend of the toiling people as Dickens, but his method of showing it was by the profound investigation of the laws which govern the production and distribution of wealth, and not by the vehement championship of benevolent fallacies.

Apart, however, from the method of benefitting the poor, stated or implied in "The Chimes," great praise must be awarded to the book for the feeling of human brotherhood it so touchingly inculcates, and for the variety and vividness of its scenes and descriptions. The passage about the night-wind, especially, is a grand example of the way in which Dickens blends imagination with observation. In weird passionate power "The Chimes" must be ranked above "The Christmas Carol," but it lacks the latter's geniality, its buoyant hope and cheer, its pervading sense of enjoyment. In "The Christmas Carol" we have, on the whole, in spite of its phantoms, a feeling that

we are out of doors; in "The Chimes" we look at everything and everybody through the medium of the author's mood.

"The Cricket on the Hearth, a Fairy Tale of Home," was published in December, 1845, and was dedicated to Lord Jeffrey. It was very popular, the circulation being double that of either of its predecessors. Mr. and Mrs. Peerybingle, Tilly Slowboy, Tackleton, Caleb Plummer and his blind daughter Bertha, all combine to make up one of the most charming of domestic stories. The carrier's jealousy of his wife, on which the plot turns, is founded on a circumstance which has been worn threadbare in fiction, that, namely, of mistaking a disguised brother for a lover; but still Dickens manages it in a fresh and masterly way, and his representation of the various phases of jealousy shows his usual skill in psychological analysis, — in the vigilant scrutiny of the slightest movements of a human soul under the impulse of a deep passion. Dot herself, the suspected wife, is as plump, as

pleasing, and as good a specimen of young matronhood as Dolly Varden is of young maidenhood. Tilly Slowboy, who has the care of Dot's baby, who shows such a wonderful command of the baby dialect of the English tongue, and who perils the dear little creature's life every five minutes by her loving clumsiness, is a marvel of "servant-girlism."

Tackleton, the toy merchant, who finds all the joy he is capable of feeling in the exercise of the anti-Christmas qualities of malice, ill-will and avarice, is drawn with much humor. Caleb, his workman, who is somewhat of an artist in toys, is troubled by restrictions which Tackleton's miserliness puts on his genius. "There is rather a run," he says, "on Noah's Arks at present. I could have wished to improve on the family, but I don't see how it's to be done at the price. It would be a satisfaction to one's mind, to make it clearer which was Shems and Hams and which was Wives. Flies a'n't on that scale neither, as compared with elephants." Tackleton, in one of his di-

rections to Caleb, has a remark the significance of which artists of all kinds must have had frequent opportunities to deplore. "There 's a small order just come in for barking dogs, and I would wish to go as close to Natur' as I could for sixpence." All over the world, limitations in respect to price prevent architects, painters, and sculptors from doing their level best; and to many sharp and just criticisms on a house, a landscape, or a statue, the poor victim of an employer's pound-foolishness might answer, in the spirit of Caleb's devotion to Tackleton, "I went as close to Natur' as I could for sixpence." The story ends, as all Christmas tales should, in general jubilation, — even old Tackleton himself dancing and making fun over the defeat of his own schemes.

"The Battle of Life" was written at Lausanne, Switzerland,[1] in the autumn of 1846,

[1] It bore the inscription: "This Christmas Book is cordially inscribed to my English friends in Switzerland."

and was published in London in December of that year. Dickens was continually fondling in his imagination some feminine ideal of self-sacrifice. In "The Battle of Life," Grace and Marion, two sisters, are in love with the same man, Albert Heathfield. He chooses Marion, who, having discovered her sister's secret, leaves her father's home, under circumstances which lead to the belief that she has eloped with Michael Warden. At the end of three years Heathfield, as Marion foresees, marries Grace; at the end of six years Marion, having mastered her affection, returns to her sister and father. The conception of the story is extravagant, and Dickens found it a task of extreme difficulty to keep himself within the possibilities of romantic self-abnegation in carrying out his plan. He measurably succeeds by delineating the two sisters as mutually gifted with natures almost celestial, and as so loving each other that each finds a certain joy in any sacrifice of self which confers happiness on the other. Grace quietly sacri-

fices her love for Alfred, and thinks she conceals the fact from Marion; but Marion, by some subtle freemasonry of the affections, detects the fact, and boldly exposes herself to all sorts of misapprehensions, in order that Grace may be rendered happy, — it being necessary that Grace should believe that she not only does not love Alfred, but that she has eloped with a person of ruined fortunes and doubtful character, whom her father would never have consented to receive as a suitor.

The exquisite beauty of the scenes between the sisters cannot blind the critic to the unreality of the whole representation. Jeffrey wrote to Dickens, "I like and admire the "Battle" extremely. It is better than any other man alive could have written, and has passages as fine as anything that ever came from the man himself. The dance of the sisters in that autumn orchard is worth a dozen inferior tales, and their reunion at the close, and indeed all the serious parts, are beautiful."

Dickens, as was usual with him when de-

lineating ideal characters that took possession of his heart and imagination, unconsciously made his prose rhythmical. "If in going over the proofs," he wrote to Forster, "you find the tendency to blank verse (I *cannot* help it when I am very much in earnest) too strong, knock out a word's brains here and there."

Among the other characters in "The Battle of Life," the two most important are Mr. Britain, the man, and Clemency, the maid, of Dr. Jeddler's house. These, in the third part of the story, are represented as happily married. Mr. Britain, sometimes called Little Britain, "in order to distinguish him from Great," is the most solemn of all kitchen coxcombs. By dint of listening at the table to the controversies on the meaning of life, entered into by the company he serves with meat and drink, he has come to consider himself quite a philosopher, — that is, he is lost, obfuscated, in profound cogitations on the problem of life. Clemency, his fellow servant, has not, in his opinion, an idea in her head, or even half a one. She

surprises him, however, by two maxims, one of which, "Forget and Forgive," is inscribed on her thimble, and the other, "Do as you would be done by," on her nutmeg-grater. "I 'm not sure," said Mr. Britain, in pondering on these, "that it 's what would be considered good philosophy. I 've my doubts about that; but it were as well, and saves a quantity of snarling, which the genuine article don't always."

When this odd couple are joined in matrimony, and the husband is comfortably established as the landlord of the village inn, he wonders at the astonishing efficiency of his wife, who indeed does everything that *is* done in the establishment, and yet considers herself as of little account, and wonders at Mr. Britain's condescension in marrying her. The character seems to be little known, and is never quoted by the admirers of Dickens; but Clemency is really one of his most felicitous delineations. Awkward to the extreme of clumsiness, ungainly, uncomely, without an atom

of self-assertion, nodding approval to all Mr. Britain's dogmatic judgments on her lack of ideas, she not only has the most affectionate of hearts, and the most intelligent of minds, but possesses a strength and integrity of character, coming from the thorough assimilation into her nature of the two maxims inscribed on her thimble and nutmeg-grater, that make her a marvel among domestic women. Her excellences pierce through even the thick hide of conceit which envelopes the comparative stupidity of her dignified mate.

Nothing can be more charming than the scene in the third part, where Mr. Britain awaits the arrival of Clemency from the neighboring market town, whither she had gone to transact business which would have more appropriately devolved upon him as the master of the house. He strolls from the doorway, where he is lounging, into the road; and, looking up at the inn, made perfect outwardly as well as inwardly by Clemency's management, remarks with much secret satisfaction,

"It 's just the sort of house *I* should wish to stop at, if I did n't keep it." [1]

"The Haunted Man, or The Ghost's Bargain," was published in December, 1848. The leading character is Redlaw, a man of science, who, haunted by memories of grief and wrong, implores the spectre of his early days to endow him with the power of forgetting what he has suffered and endured, and for the power of communicating the boon to others. His wish is granted, and he finds to his horror that the fatal gift tends to dehumanize him, and to dehumanize those with whom he is placed in contact; and his re-

[1] It is intesting to note Dickens's own opinion of *The Battle of Life* in an artistic way. In reply to a letter from Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton he wrote: "I was thoroughly wretched at having to use the idea for so short a story. I did not see its full capacity until it was too late to think of another subject, and I have always felt that I might have done a greal deal better if I had taken it for the groundwork of a more extended book. But for an insuperable aversion I have to trying back in such a case I should certainly forge that bit of metal again, as you suggest — one of these days perhaps."

demption comes from the restoration to him of the memory from which he so eagerly parted. As a contrast to this character we have a simple, good, uneducated woman, Mrs. William, whose heart has been made tender by affliction, and whose remembered sorrow is a constant inspiration to the performance of benevolent deeds. These two persons appear in the various scenes of the book, one exercising an injurious, the other a benign, influence on all they meet. The majority of the incidents are necessarily tragic or pathetic; but still the rich and beneficent humor of the author has full play in the representation of the Tatterby family, and their introduction is so contrived that they appear to be brought in not merely to give relief to the prevailing seriousness of the story, but to afford a pertinent illustration of its main design.

After the publication of "The Haunted Man," Dickens's contributions to Christmas literature were confined to short sketches and stories, published in the Christmas numbers

of "Household Words" and "All the Year Round." Sixteen of these "Christmas Numbers" were issued up to the time of his death. They were edited by Dickens, but most of the matter was supplied by other writers. His name, combined with the fact of their cheapness, gave them an enormous circulation, and he probably received more money for them than for his elaborate Christmas tales. The circulation of "Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions," for instance, was 250,000 copies during the first week of its publication.

II

Possibly the difficulties under which "The Haunted Man" came to be written and the feeling that a whole novel had been lost in it, had something to do with Dickens's discontinuance of the Christmas books proper; the Christmas stories, as collaborated affairs, appear to have resulted from the exigency of periodical publication, and one can mark the evolution of the idea.

"Household Words" was started in the spring of 1850. The date of publication nearest to Christmas that year was December 21, and the number for that day was labelled "The Christmas Number." It was the regular weekly issue, but it was given over entirely to prose and verse relating to Christmas, but there was no other connection between the separate parts. Dickens's own contribution was "A Christmas Tree," which was the initial article.

When Christmas, 1851, came round, the experiment was continued, but this time the Christmas number was an extra one. Again the entire number was given over to sketches and essays in prose and verse, having to do with Christmas, but there is a more formal and deliberate plan; the several contributions evidently were assigned as topics. Dickens again opened the ball with "What Christmas is as we grow older"; and he was followed by eight other contributors who labored to answer such questions as What Christmas is

in Country Places, After a Long Absence, If You Outgrow it, and the like.

The element of fiction was not prominent in these numbers, but at Christmas, 1852, the extra number of "Household Words" was entitled "A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire"; they were detached from each other, and had the title merely to connect them. In this group were "The Poor Relation's Story" and "The Child's Story," the first two of a group of ten. The same scheme was followed in 1853, and Dickens furnished the first and last of a group of nine, namely, "The Schoolboy's Story," and "Nobody's Story."

In 1854 a more distinct framework was devised in "The Seven Poor Travellers." Here again Dickens led off with the general description of the Inn and the company, told the first story, and when the others had related their tales, wound up the whole with the final chapter, "The Road." Something of the same scheme was adopted in "The Holly

Tree Inn," which followed in 1855. Three more extra Christmas numbers of "Household Words" followed, and employed the same device of collaboration. "All the Year Round" was started in 1859, and the same plan was pursued, but Dickens appears to have used his position as editor to dovetail the work more closely now and then. When "Mugby Junction," the last but one of these Christmas numbers, was published, the names of the authors of the several stories were advertised. Finally, "No Thoroughfare," the last of these joint efforts, was deliberately the collaboration of two only, Dickens and Wilkie Collins, and so composed that it is quite impossible to separate the two writers in certain portions.

The only formal introduction which Dickens gave to these writings was the following brief Preface, prefixed to the first collection of Christmas Books: —

"The narrow space within which it was necessary to confine these Christmas Stories when they were originally published, ren-

dered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their machinery. I never attempted great elaboration of detail in the working out of character within such limits, believing that it could not succeed. My purpose was, in a whimsical kind of masque which the good humor of the season justified, to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land."

XVIII

THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD

THE last number of "Our Mutual Friend" was published in November, 1865. Between that time and the appearance of the first number of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," nearly five years elapsed. With the exception of his contribution to the Christmas supplement of "All the Year Round," Dickens appears, during these years, to have written little, except "George Silverman's Explanation," contributed to "The Atlantic Monthly," published by Fields, Osgood & Co., and "A Holiday Romance," contributed to "Our Young Folks," a juvenile magazine, issued by the same American firm. For the two latter trivialities (as we may relatively style them), Fields, Osgood & Co., paid him a thousand pounds. Some eight years before, he received from Mr. Bonner, of "The New York Ledger," the same

amount for the tale of "Hunted Down." In the whole history of literature, there are no other instances of sums so large paid for services so small. "Hunted Down," especially, is a story of the size of an ordinary magazine article, and has no other indication of Dickens's genius than a certain faint reflection of his manner, which George Augustus Sala might easily have mimicked; and yet Bonner paid for it one hundred times the price that Milton's publisher paid for "Paradise Lost," four times the price which Tonson gave Dryden for the twelve thousand lines of the "Fables" (including Alexander's Feast), and probably much more than Gray, Collins, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats, combined, received for the whole body of their verse. There can be no greater testimony to the value of a name, won by merit, than such premiums given to performances by no means meritorious.

The popularity of Dickens is, indeed, one of the marvels of literature. His mere name became a good investment for capital. He

himself knew the worth of it to the last farthing, as a manufacturer of silks or calicoes knows the worth of a pattern he has invented, and which has become "the rage"; and he traded on his name with a business-like sagacity, compounded of prudence, vigilance, discretion, and foresight, which has rarely been surpassed in any commercial counting-room. Had he lived twenty years longer, his fortune must have rivaled that of some of the great mercantile houses; for his death was occasioned by no disease which touched the inventiveness of his brain, and he was hardly ever in more assured possession of his faculties than while writing, the day before his death, the conclusion of the twenty-third chapter of "Edwin Drood."

Even if he should have sparingly indulged in the work of creating new denizens for his vast imaginative domain of Dickens-land, he might, by his readings, have made from £15,000 to £20,000 a year. There was no limit to his audiences in any country where

the English language was spoken; and the desire to see and hear and read him was never greater than at the hour he was suddenly stricken with death. With a few exceptions, his popularity from the start was constantly cumulative, until at last it became quite a moneyed power. This was evident in the contract he made with the publishers of "Edwin Drood." Every poorly paid author glowed with enthusiasm, or paled with envy, when he considered how Dickens contrived to exact from publishers a sum so enormous. At any rate, the dignity of the profession of authorship was exalted by the amount freely given to one of the craft, by the class that authors are wont to look upon as their natural enemies. The terms of the arrangement were, that Dickens was to receive for a novel in twelve monthly parts, — that is, a novel of the size of "Great Expectations," — £7500, on a sale of 25,000 copies. After that number was reached, publisher and author were to share equally in the profits of the sales; and, as

sion of the ordinary relation of the artist to the public. Commonly the trouble is to get an audience; but in this case there was a constant struggle and fight going on, as to who should have the privilege, at any expenditure of money, to be one of the audience. The price of admission was very high, — twice the price paid to witness the performances of Rachel or Ristori; but the difficulty was not in the price, but in getting admission at any price. The speculators in tickets reaped a rich reward. It was impossible for Dolby to prevent them from plundering the public. "First come, first served," was a maxim found to entail cruel injustice, as the speculators were willing to take half or all the tickets for each evening, if they could succeed, by encamping over night at the door of the ticket office, in being in the foremost line of the grand rush in the morning. Then it was decided that no more than six tickets should be sold to one person; but the speculators easily adapted themselves to this rule, by posting some fifty brawny fellows as

near the doors as they could be packed. In a few cases, tickets were sold for fifty dollars; twenty dollars was a common charge; and yet a considerable minority of the insatiable public, eager to get sight of the great man at any cost, were disappointed.

All those who paid extortionate prices for tickets, and all who failed of getting tickets at any price, joined in cursing Mr. Dolby as the one visible object on whom their rage might be discharged. His commission on the regular receipts of all the readings was £2888; and certainly he earned more than that sum, if we merely compute what an honest man should properly charge for being privately and publicly denounced as a rogue and a ruffian, during a period, in Mr. Micawber's phrase, "of six calendar months." In addition to the inevitable unpleasant consequences arising from his being the keeper of the great literary lion, and made responsible for the difficulty of supplying seats for five thousand applicants in halls which could hold only fifteen hundred, he was

bitterly assailed by certain newspapers because he had not sent them advertisements of the readings, even after he had received notice that the said advertisements would open the editorial columns of the journals to such paragraphs as Dolby might consider judicious to insert. Dickens notices that an item appeared in the editorial columns of one of the rejected newspapers to this effect: "This chap, calling himself Dolby, got drunk down town last night, and was taken to the police station for fighting an Irishman." Indeed, the rage against the innocent Dolby, guilty only of being the business agent of a man whom everybody desired to hear, but who could be heard only by a fraction of "everybody," at last passed into a subject on which hundreds of editors exercised their disciplined capacity for jocose sarcasm, raillery, and abuse.

The whole vast joke culminated when Dickens read in Washington. There was the usual fight for tickets of admission, and the usual disappointments in securing seats. The ex-

cluded members of the Senate and the House of Representatives met, it was said, in secret session. Everything uttered in that assemblage of dignitaries — that is, those legislators of the United States who had failed to obtain tickets to hear Dickens read the "Christmas Carol," "Boots at the Holly Tree Inn," and "Bob Sawyer's Party" — was protected from report by the usual methods which shut out from the public the terrible determinations of these august personages, when they are constitutionally withdrawn from the public eye. As usual, some newspaper correspondent, disguised as a Senator or Representative, was in the conclave; and he revealed to the "New York Herald," or the "Tribune," the result of its deliberations. He, of course, preserved a certain reserve in announcing the decision, which was the result of their secret debate, as it seemed to threaten the stability of the peace between two nations, bound together by community of language and race, by a common brotherhood in Shakespeare, Milton, Newton,

and Locke, and by all those other ties of kindred, about which orators have bored us so pitilessly that they have almost converted them into justifiable grounds of deadly enmity. The result, however, though obscurely stated, amounted to this: That, in any treaty hereafter made with Great Britain, the inhabitants of the United States would cordially shake hands with the inhabitants of the British Empire, with one marked exception. The government of the United States could forgive and forget everything, with the single exception of the outrages committed by one Englishman, who should be banished from the pale of civilization, and be forever accursed. The name of this person was Dolby: —

"Letters five do form his name!"

Dickens was amazed, not merely by the overwhelming tribute to his genius as an impersonator of his own characters, but by the general compliance with his wish that his privacy should not be disturbed by importunate callers, eager to bore him with attentions

which would have robbed him of his time, and interfered with his precautions to preserve his health. He passed through the country, which was resounding with his name, as safe from the intrusion of impulsive admiration or impertinent curiosity, as though he had been only an ordinary English gentleman. We hardly can bring to mind another instance of such immense publicity combined with all the advantages of that seclusion which is the privilege of unnoted private life.

Dickens's letters to his friends and family in England are mostly filled with accounts of his pecuniary successes. Every Bostonian must remember the freezing November morning when the approaches to the publishing house of Fields, Osgood & Co. were obstructed by the long line of persons anxious to obtain tickets; and many a Bostonian must also date an incurable disease of the lungs as the result of patient waiting for his turn to expend his money. A New York wit renamed the city Boz-town. Dickens wrote, on November 21:

"An immense train of people waited in the freezing street for twelve hours, and passed into the office in their turns, as at a French theatre. The receipts for these (four) nights already exceed our calculation by more than £250."

On the 2d of December, 1867, he read in "Boz-town" for the first time in the United States. His subjects were the "Christmas Carol" and "The Trial from Pickwick." His reception was all that he could have desired. When, in the "Trial" scene, Samuel Weller was called to the witness stand, there broke forth a roar of applause which indicated both the popularity of that gentleman, and the familiarity of the audience with all his sayings and doings. On the next morning he wrote to Forster: "It is really impossible for me to exaggerate the magnificence of the reception or the effect of the reading. The whole city will talk of nothing else and hear of nothing else to-day. . . . At the decreased rate of money, even, we had £450 English in the house last night."

In New York there was a similar enthusiasm. At two in the morning there was a small crowd before the ticket office; at five o'clock it had increased to eight hundred; at eight, to five thousand; at nine, there were two lines of purchasers, each three quarters of a mile in length. Five or ten dollars were offered "for the mere permission to exchange places with other persons standing nearer the head of the line." The profits each night of the readings in New York exceeded the estimate by the sum of £130. Before the end of December he remitted £3000 to England.

But the climate was beginning to tell upon him. He was afflicted with a severe catarrh, and during the last four months of his journeyings in the country he could hardly be said to pass a day in good health. His indomitable will, however, bore him up under all discouragements though he could not restrain certain explosions of feeling when things went wrong; for it is a common experience that the stronger the will, when it works under adverse cir-

cumstances, the more irritable becomes the temper, especially when illness as well as all kinds of external obstructions are to be overcome. We do not, on the whole, envy the position of anybody who was on Dickens's "staff," while he was perambulating the country. Floods and storms, which had no respect for the novelist, impeded occasionally the roads on which he travelled; and, as the loss of an engagement was equivalent to the loss of three or four hundred pounds, he must have felt more than an ordinary lecturer's irritable uneasiness at inevitable delays in railroad travel, and have visited on his "staff" the vexation which should properly have been expended on impertinent snowstorms and insolent floods. Had Dickens gone to South America, and been interrupted in his progress by an earthquake, which destroyed the population to which he was hastening to read, he would have felt a similar irritation, and expended it, not on Nature, but on such specimens of human nature as happened to surround him at the time, and

to be interested in his punctual appearance in the city at the hour when it was wrecked by the lifting of the earth, or submerged by a tidal wave.

Dickens's letters from the United States, as we have said, were mostly confined to a record of the enormous receipts of his readings. He was careful to remit everything he gained to England, distrusting equally all American securities and insecurities, — even the securities of the government. Had he invested his earnings in United States bonds he would have made at least £5000 more than he did by placing them in the English funds. He sympathized with Sir William Scott in his liking for "the elegant simplicity of the three per cents." He preferred this elegant simplicity to everything that our country could offer in town, city, state, railway, or government bonds. Indeed, he seemed impatient to realize his gains as fast as possible in English money, though the premium on gold was forty per cent. He appeared to think that nothing was stable in

the currency or capital of the country, and that a week's lapse in remitting to London would reduce his seeming receipts a fourth or a fifth. He might have been excused for distrusting all the evidences of wealth that met his eyes in our great cities and manufacturing towns; but it is singular that he should have been skeptical as to the ability of the United States government to meet its obligations, when he found its citizens possessing sufficient surplus income to pay extortionate prices for the privilege of seeing and hearing him.

It is curious to observe how obtuse Dickens was in reference to the fact that Great Britain would not pay a fifth, or at least a third, of the amount which he received in the United States. The Chappells began with paying him, clear of all expenses, £50 a night. This was increased to £60 before he entered on his American enterprise; and after he returned from that most triumphant of ovations, they only paid him £80 a night for a series of seventy-five readings. Had he consented to

engagement in good health, I shall have made by the Readings in two years, £33,000; that is to say, £13,000 received from the Chappells and £20,000 from America." According to this statement, he made £7000 more by reading six months in the United States, than by reading eighteen months in Great Britain.

Apart from his audiences, Dickens saw little in his second visit to the United States. The scholars of Cambridge, Boston, and New York were mostly old friends. He loved Longfellow, of course, because nobody, whether Englishman or American, could meet him without loving him. Agassiz, the great naturalist, he met for the first time, and was magnetized by him as all persons, gentle or simple, educated or ignorant, were magnetized the moment they came into his presence. He perceived at once that Agassiz had a richness of nature which was nearly as remarkable as his intellectual scope and power, and he regretted every obstruction which prevented his

forming a more intimate acquaintance with that wonderful creature, whose manners were as cordial as his knowledge was vast, and who seemed to hide his greatness in his geniality.

Two things must unpleasantly impress every American reader of Dickens's private letters to his English friends, during his second visit to the United States. The first is his contempt for the government, though it had recently put a million men into the field to crush the most formidable of all rebellions. The second is, his strange forgetfulness of all his anti-slavery enthusiam, as he witnessed the struggle to endow the emancipated slave with his true liberty-preserver, the right of suffrage.

As to the first, he showed no appreciation of the heroism and sacrifices either of the North or the South. His judgment of the government was expressed in a letter to Forster, dated January 14, 1868, and written from Philadelphia. "I see," he says, "great changes for the better, socially. Politically, no. Eng-

Gladstone or Lord John Russell, wished the American government God speed in its work. The war ended with the complete emancipation of the slaves; and then the majority of American statesmen and legislators considered that the blacks could be protected in their newborn rights only by giving them the suffrage.

Dickens appeared in the country at the time when radical Republicans like Charles Sumner, and conservative Republicans like William Pitt Fessenden, were united in sustaining a scheme of Reconstruction which gave to the negroes the right of voting. Statesmen were debating whether this would be wrong or right, politic or impolitic; but Dickens looked upon the contest as a sentimentalist. The thick-lipped negro, with his supposed radiation of offensive smells, was, as long as he continued a slave, a person around whom all the benevolence of Great Britain should rally, and damn to everlasting perdition the government that held him as a bondman. The moment he was free, another class of scents and senti-

ments came into play; and Dickens, in his second visit to the United States, became quite a convert to negrophobia, and joined in with the polite persons who were quite sure that no emancipated slave could be an intelligent voter. So he writes to Forster: "At Baltimore I had a charming little theatre, and a very apprehensive, impulsive audience. It is remarkable to see how the Ghost of Slavery haunts the town; and how the shambling, untidy, evasive, and postponing Irrepressible proceeds about his free work, going round and round it instead of at it. The melancholy absurdity of giving these people votes, at any rate at present, would glare at one out of every roll of their eyes, chuckle in their mouths, and bump in their heads, if one did not see (as one cannot help seeing in the country) that their enfranchisement is a mere trick to get votes."

If this judgment of the negro be compared with the author's assault on the Circumlocution Office, it will be found that the free African, going round and round his work

without doing it, was merely copying Lord Palmerston, or Lord Derby, in his performance of his public duty; and that the waiter at the Baltimore Hotel was striving "How Not to Do It" after illustrious examples, and was as worthy of being a political power as were those illustrious noblemen. But Dickens goes on: "When I read in Mr. Beecher's church at Brooklyn, we found the trustees had suppressed the fact that a certain upper gallery holding one hundred and fifty was the 'Colored Gallery.' On the first night not a soul could be induced to enter it; and it was not until it became known next day that I was certainly not going to read there more than four times, that we managed to fill it. One night at New York, in our second or third row, there were two well-dressed women with a tinge of colour — I should say, not even quadroons. But the holder of one ticket, who found his seat to be next to them, demanded of Dolby, 'what he meant by fixing him next to those two Gord darmed cusses of niggers?' and

insisted on being supplied with another place. Dolby firmly replied that he was perfectly certain Mr. Dickens would not recognize such an objection on any account, but he could have his money back, if he chose, — which, after some squabbling, he had.

"In a comic scene in the New York circus one night, when I was looking on, four white people sat down upon a form in a barber's shop to be shaved. A colored man came as the fifth customer, and the four immediately ran away. This was much laughed at and applauded. In the Baltimore penitentiary, the white prisoners dine on one side of the room the colored prisoners on the other: and no one has the slightest idea of mixing them. But it is indubitably the fact that exhalations not the most agreeable arise from a number of colored people put together, and I was obliged to beat a quick retreat from their dormitory. I strongly believe that they will die out of this country fast. It seems, looking at them, so manifestly absurd, to suppose that they can

ever hold their own against a restless, shifty, striving, stronger race."

Every reader will readily perceive how foolish it was, on Dickens's principles, to emancipate a race doomed to swift extinction. When he first came to the country, the downtrodden slave was the most interesting object for a philanthropist to regard; when, after an absence of twenty-five years, he returned to the country, the uprisen slave was a freeman to be despised, because he was ugly in face, smelt badly, and could not keep his own in the free struggle of white race with black race. Ignoring the fact that, in looking over the whole country, the Irish and the blacks appear to have the greatest power of continuing their species on this portion of the planet, there is something specially exasperating in a humane romancer, who taunts us with disregarding the rights of humanity in 1842, and then, in 1868, after we have spent nearly a million lives and some five billions of treasure in an attempt to accommodate ourselves

to his philanthropic ideas, sneers at us for attempting to elevate a race which he jauntily dooms to sure extinction.

But let us leave such questions as these. The great value of Dickens's readings was the proof they afforded that his leading characters were not caricatures. His illustrators, especially Cruikshank, made them often appear to be caricatures, by exaggerating their external oddities of feature or eccentricities of costume, rather than by seeking to represent their internal life; and the reader became accustomed to turn to the rough picture of the person as though the author's deep humorous conception of the character was embodied in the artist's hasty and superficial sketch. As it was thought that serial publications must be illustrated, in order to add to their popularity, and as Dickens began Pickwick only with the idea of writing a prose commentary on Seymour's pictures,[1] he drifted into the habit

[1] The introduction to Pickwick scarcely supports so strong a statement.

of engaging an artist to supply illustrations for each of his serial novels. There was no possible field offered for the sketcher really to interpret the author's text, and the text was often withheld to the last moment. Dickens himself relied on the printed, and not on the pictorial, representations of the characters, to convey his conceptions. The pictures were thrown in, as an indispensable element in the business speculation of giving the book the widest possible circulation. When the reader looked to the illustration, he supposed that, as the author had allowed it to be inserted in his novel, its vices of distortion and grotesqueness corresponded to the same qualities in Dickens's mind. This notion was dispelled the moment he witnessed the creator of the characters undertake to impersonate them — when he saw him visibly transform himself into Scrooge or Squeers, Sam Weller or Bob Sawyer, Tiny Tim or Paul Dombey, Mr. Micawber or Mr. Peggotty, Betsy Prig or Mrs. Gamp, John Browdie or Boots at the

Inn, Miss Squeers or 'Tilda Price. The characters then seemed, not only all alive, but full of individual life; and, however odd, eccentric, unpleasing, or strange, they always appeared to be natural, always appeared to be personal natures rooted in human nature.

He was indeed a very great actor; and when the personages assumed were his own creations, he was at times a marvelous actor, appearing to have as many faces and voices as he had individuals to represent. His Squeers was one of his masterpieces. The voice he gave to that eminent teacher of youth seemed to be a pure invention, with tones that had never been heard before in the civilized world; but a few months after hearing it, I happened to be in a little western public house beyond the Mississippi, and my surprise was great when the landlord thereof accosted me in the same voice which had astounded me in listening to Dickens's Squeers. There is probably no other instance in literature of such a power of creating characters

combined with such a power of impersonating them, as we find in the case of Dickens.

Dickens left the United States for his English home in ill health, but the sea voyage appeared to benefit him. He arrived in the first week of May, 1868. Before he had completed his first American readings in Boston, he had engaged with the Chappells to give a hundred readings for £8000 on his return to Great Britain. He began them in October, 1868, adding in January, 1869, to his ordinary reading list, the terrible scene from "Oliver Twist," where Sikes murders Nancy. This melodramatic episode was given with such melodramatic "power that it occasioned what he called a contagion of fainting" among the female portion of his auditors. "At Clifton," he wrote to his daughter, "I should think we had from a dozen to twenty ladies taken out stiff and rigid, at various times! It became quite ridiculous." Indeed, though the scene was wonderfully realized to the senses and the feelings of his audiences, this reading must have been

essentially coarse in its power, even though Macready, then in his dotage, declared that the "Murder was two Macbeths." It is not the business of an artist to represent a murder in such a way as to make his auditors feel that they are looking on a brutal house-breaker killing his mistress. The faintings were "ridiculous," because it is not the purpose of the actor's art to produce faintings or convulsion fits, and his power is not to be estimated by the number of women carried out of the theatre "stiff and rigid" in the course of each performance. Then the unusual exertion required in reading the scenes from "Oliver Twist" was one, among other causes, of Dickens's premature death. In reading other portions of his works, his pulse sometimes went up very high; but the Sikes and Nancy scenes often carried it to 120. He suffered himself in making others suffer; and his sufferings as well as theirs were, in Hamlet's phrase, "from the purpose" of acting.

The chief cause of his death, however, was

general overwork. His physicians warned him in vain, that the pain in his feet was not a merely local trouble; that the dizziness in his head, and the strange affection of his eyes by which he could read only the halves of letters over the shop doors that were on his right as he looked, were not the results of taking medicine; and that his "weakness and deadness on the left side" were hints of impending paralysis. His will bore him up to the last, in struggling against symptoms to which a less resolute man would have at once very properly succumbed.

It is needless to add that the money which was pouring in upon him as the reward of his painful labours was not regarded as a means for future self-indulgence, but as a treasure which would enable his family of children to have a fair start in life, with something to depend upon in case they failed in their first ventures. He gave up his own life in order that their lives might be made easier and happier than his own. If there was any taint of selfish-

ness in his generous and genial nature, it was that form of the quality which urges men to have their own benevolent way, and work out the resolves of their own well-intentioned will, regardless of the advice of others who are better qualified to give an impersonal judgment on the circumstances of each case. As it was, however, he is distinguished from all other eminent authors in this, that he left, as the result of his own exertions, a large fortune to his family. His real and personal property at the time of his death was estimated, and probably underestimated, at £93,000.

Meanwhile the end was approaching. In March, 1870, a hemorrhage, which had sometimes troubled him in his early life, returned in an aggravated form. On the 7th of May he read to Forster and other friends the fifth num- of "Edwin Drood," and seemed in excellent spirits. Ten days after, he was to attend the Queen's ball with his daughter; but on the day before the ball he wrote to Forster: "I am sorry to report, that, in the old preposter-

ous endeavour to dine at preposterous hours and in preposterous places, I have been pulled at by a sharp attack in my foot. And serve me right. I hope to get the better of it soon, but I fear I must not think of dining with you on Friday. I have canceled everything in the dining way for this week, and that is a very small precaution after the horrible pain I have had and the remedies I have taken."

On the 30th he left London for Gadshill, with his foot no better, but with a determination to avoid all invitations, and devote his time to "Edwin Drood." "On the 8th of June," says Forster, "he passed all the day writing in the Châlet. He came over for luncheon, and, much against his usual custom, returned to his desk. Of the sentences he was then writing, the last of his long life of literature, . . . the reader will observe the direction his thoughts had taken. He imagines such a brilliant morning as had risen with the 8th of June, shining on the old city of Rochester. He sees in surpassing beauty,

with the lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air, its antiquities, and its ruins; its Cathedral and Castle. But his fancy, then, is not with the stern dead forms of either; but with that which makes warm the cold stone tombs of centuries, and lights them up with flecks of brightness, 'fluttering there like wings.' To him, on that sunny summer morning, the changes of glorious light from moving boughs, the songs of birds, the scents from garden, woods, and fields, have penetrated into the Cathedral, have subdued its earthy odor, and are preaching the Resurrection and the Life."

He continued that day to write on the twenty-third chapter of "Edwin Drood" up to the final sentence where it now concludes, with Mr. Datchery's adding a thick chalk-line to his score of hieroglyphics against Mr. Jasper, and then falling to his breakfast "with an appetite." Dinner was ordered at the house at six o'clock; and Dickens left the Châlet only in time to write a few letters — one of

that a peculiar power had passed away from the earth, which could not be exactly replaced by anything that remained upon it.

The general feeling in Great Britain was that the only fit burial place for the mortal frame of such an immortal genius was Westminster Abbey. In his lifetime, he repeatedly expressed the desire that after his death his body should be hid away in some quiet graveyard, far from the public eye; and in his will are these words: "I emphatically direct that I be buried in an inexpensive, unostentatious, and strictly private manner; that no public announcement be made of the time or place of my burial; that at the utmost not more than three plain mourning coaches be employed; and that those who attend my funeral wear no scarf, cloak, black bow, long hatband, *or other such revolting absurdity.* I direct that my name be inscribed in plain English letters on my tomb, without the addition of 'Mr.' or 'Esquire.' I conjure my friends on no account to make me the subject

of any monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever. I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works, and to the remembrance of my friends upon their experience of me in addition thereto."

The "revolting absurdity" which he thus stigmatizes, in reference to the accredited marks of mourning, he had exposed in his representations of such professional getters up of elegant funerals as the waggish Mr. Mould, in "Martin Chuzzlewit," and the jocose Mr. Omer, in "David Copperfield," and he was determined that his own body, after he had left it, should not be desecrated by such ridiculous observances.

His injunctions as to privacy being observed, he was buried, on Tuesday, the 14th of June, with the knowledge only of those who took part in the ceremony, in Westminster Abbey, in a spot which the Dean of Westminster had selected. "The solemnity," says Forster, "was not lost by the simplicity.

Nothing so grand or so touching could have accompanied it, as the stillness and silence of the vast Cathedral. Then later in the day, and all the following day, came unbidden mourners in such crowds, that the Dean had to request permission to keep open the grave until Thursday; but after it was closed they did not cease to come, and 'all day long,' Dr. Stanley wrote on the 17th, 'there was a constant pressure to the spot, and many flowers were strewn upon it by unknown hands, many tears shed from unknown eyes.'" . . . The stone placed upon it is simply inscribed: —

CHARLES DICKENS

BORN FEBRUARY THE SEVENTH, 1812

DIED JUNE THE NINTH, 1870

"I hope his book is finished," Longfellow wrote to Forster, when he received the intelligence of Dickens's death; "it is certainly one of his most beautiful works, if not the most beautiful of all. It would be sad to think the

pen had fallen from his hand, and left it incomplete."

Indeed, since he who

> "Left half told,
> The story of Cambuscan bold,"

there is no unfinished work of romance which has so attracted and so puzzled critical curiosity as this "Mystery" of Edwin Drood. We all know, or think we know, that Drood was murdered, and murdered by his uncle Jasper, but the means and method of the murder still remain obscure. At last, in response to this laudable curiosity, spiritual communication was seemingly obtained with the soul of Dickens, and he was so considerate as to dictate the remaining chapters through a spiritual medium; but, alas! it was an impostor who got hold of the somnolent scribe, and what he reported of the pretended Charles Dickens was nothing more than this, that if spiritualism be true, hoaxing the public is as favourite an amusement in the sphere immediately beyond the grave as it is on this side of it; or, at best,

that spirits altogether lose their genius the moment they leave the body which is here ignorantly supposed to limit its scope.

If Dickens could have lived to note the confession of Jasper, as, in his opium sleep, he described the way in which he murdered his nephew, and disposed of his body, we doubtless should have had all our queries answered, and should also have been furnished with an additional example of his power of psychological analysis in detailing the movements, and representing the states, of exceptionally criminal souls. Jasper is altogether the most original of his villains.

Mr. Forster tells us that Dickens's first idea was to make the main interest of the romance depend on such a relation as that established between Rosa and Edwin Drood, which now remains as an incident of secondary importance. In August, 1869, Dickens wrote: "I laid aside the fancy I told you of, and have a very curious and new idea for my new story. Not a communicable idea (or the interest of

the book would be gone), but a very strong one, though difficult to work." Forster afterwards learned that the story was to be the murder of a nephew by his uncle, "the originality of which was to consist in the review of the murderer's career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not he the culprit, but some other man were the tempted. The last chapters were to be written in the condemned cell, to which his wickedness, all elaborately elicited from him as if told of another, had brought him. Discovery by the murderer of the utter needlessness of the murder for its object was to follow hard upon the commission of the deed; but all discovery of the murderer was to be baffled till towards the close, when, by means of a gold ring which had resisted the corrosive effects of the lime into which he had thrown the body, not only the person murdered was to be identified, but the locality of the crime and the man who committed it. So much was told to me before the book was written."

Dickens evidently brought into the story, as he afterwards wrote it, many elements of interest that he had not mentioned to Forster. Jasper, the uncle, is represented as an artistic voluptuary, who is disgusted with the humdrum of his life as the leader of a Cathedral choir in a provincial city, and who indulges in the wildest dreams of love and power that the lavish use of opium can excite. His moral sense, as is usually the case with opium eaters and smokers, is entirely destroyed, so far as it operates to restrain him from criminal acts. He falls madly in love with the girl who is betrothed to his nephew, and coolly determines to murder the latter, simply as an obstacle to the gratification of his desires.

The hag who keeps the opium den, to which he resorts for the supreme indulgence of his habit, notices that, in his disturbed sleep, he enacts, in imagination, some crime which he aches practically to commit. Her suspicions are aroused; and she hopes to gain some profit by watching her customer, and tracing him

to his home. Her first attempt fails. She follows him to Cloisterham without discovering his name or residence. On the fatal evening when Edwin Drood passes into his uncle's house, she accosts him as a beggar, receives the sum she asks for, inquires his name, and tells him to be thankful that it is not "Ned," as that is a threatened name. She has heard it in Jasper's ravings and knows that he who holds it is doomed. In her second visit to Cloisterham she verifies the object of her search, and gives Mr. Datchery, the detective, the clue that he is seeking.

The book closes just at this interesting point. The intention, according to Forster, was to bring in Lieutenant Tartar, Mr. Crisparkle, and Neville Landless, as agents in hunting down the murderer, and Landless was to lose his life in assisting Tartar finally to unmask and seize him. Tartar, in the end, was to marry Rosa, and Crisparkle was to marry Helena Landless.

Although the end of the novel can thus be

foreseen, the "mystery" of the murder remains unsolved. One fact is to be noticed, that Jasper, on the night of the murder, wears a "large black scarf of strong close-woven silk loosely round his neck, and as he enters his dwelling to receive Drood and Landless, he pulls it off, and hangs it in a loop on his arm. From this we gather that he strangled his nephew shortly after Drood had parted with Landless, about midnight, at Mr. Crisparkle's door. What did he do with the body? The reader will remember that when Jasper calls upon Durdles at his house, in order to take him as a guide in a visit by moonlight to the tombs, vaults, and towers of the Cathedral, Durdles warns him to beware of a mound of quick-lime by the gate of his yard, — "quick enough," he says, "to eat your boots, — with a little handy stirring, quick enough to eat your bones."

This yard is comparatively near Mr. Crisparkle's door, where Landless parts with Drood on the night of the murder. The indications, therefore, point to the supposition that Jasper,

after strangling his nephew, took from him his watch and shirt-pin, cast his body into the bed of quick-lime, and then walked in the wild storm down to the Weir, two miles away, and cast the watch and shirt-pin into the river, —where they were afterwards found by Mr. Crisparkle. The ring, which Edwin was to deliver to Rosa, in case they agreed to marry, still remained on his finger, and ultimately became the means of identifying the spot where the body was thrown to be consumed.

This theory, however, does not account for the chief incident in the twelfth chapter, namely, the descent of Jasper into the crypt of the Cathedral, accompanied by Durdles, the two hours' drunken sleep of the latter, the use that Jasper during that time makes of the key of the crypt door, and his wild rage, on going out, when he fears that the hideous small boy, Deputy, has been watching him during the interval. There would seem to be some unexplained connection between this visit to the crypt and the disposal of Drood's dead body.

A minor mystery relates to Mr. Datchery, "the old buffer," who is evidently sent to Cloisterham by Mr. Grewgious to watch Mr. Jasper. Are there any indications in those portions of the novel we possess, that he is a personage we already know under another name? A shrewd guess would be, that he is that clerk of Mr. Grewgious whom we know under the name of Bazzard, and who is present in the office when Edwin Drood calls on his employer. When, however, Rosa flies to her guardian to escape the passionate importunities of Jasper, he informs her that Mr. Bazzard is off duty now, and that he is compelled to borrow a substitute from a legal firm down stairs. He then tells her that his clerk is a dramatic poet, who has written a play, rejected by the managers, called "The Thorn of Anxiety"—a "dreadfully appropriate name," Mr. Grewgious adds, "but Mr. Bazzard hopes, and I hope, that it will come out at last." The theory that Mr. Datchery is a transformed Bazzard, who is giving

his dramatic talent a practical direction, might be sustained by the fact that the clerk's disappearance from the London office corresponds to Mr. Datchery's advent in Cloisterham.

The arrest in the development of the plot of the story is hardly more provoking than the sudden stop put to the development and exhibition of the characters. What an immense fund of entertainment lay enclosed in Mrs. Billickin, *the* "Billickin," who appears only to disappear, and who, if she could have had a full representation of her traits, might have been no mean rival of Mrs. Todgers. Tartar, also, is an acquaintance that it is sad to lose soon after our first introduction to him. Then there is the professional philanthropist, Mr. Honeythunder, who carries into ordinary conversation the smiting invective which Cicero reserved for Verres, and Burke for Hastings. We have only the half of him, and must mourn over the loss of the other half with a grief that refuses to be comforted. Mr. Bazzard-Datchery, also, after promising to be as

notable a personage as the Mr. Bucket of "Bleak House," is rubbed out as swiftly as one might erase his last triumphant chalk-mark on Mrs. Tope's cupboard door.

It would seem that Dickens must have caught the first idea of the Rev. Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, from the character of Charles Kingsley, differing as he does from the latter in so many respects. It is rare that we meet, either in literature or in life, a person who gives the impression of perfect physical purity; and Mr. Crisparkle is such a paragon, with a moral health corresponding to his physical perfection, so that, whenever he appears in the book, it seems as if he had just emerged from a plunge into cold, running water, and had on him the pure and cheerful glow which such a plunge produces in all vigorous constitutions, and had also on him the additional glow which indicates that the bath had been a baptism. The influence of his wholesome character radiates from him unconsciously, so that Neville Landless and

his sister, whose wilfulness had increased with every utterance of Mr. Honeythunder's sonorous, ethical eloquence, are tamed by a single look from his eye or a simple word from his mouth. He, also, is a man whom the reader parts with reluctantly.

Mr. Sapsea is the most portentous of all the author's delineations of solemn human asses. His conceit is as colossal as his stupidity. The inscription on Mrs. Sapsea's monument is probably the most audacious of the many strokes of Dickens's extravagant humour, it being a masterpiece of absurdity, self-importance, and self-delusion. The account which Mr. Sapsea gives of his wooing of Miss Brobity ranks next to it in comic extravagance. As Mr. Sapsea is a donkey, positive and confessed, whose ears become prominent every time he opens his mouth, it is a mistake in art for Dickens to make Jasper, on the occasion of the disappearance of Edwin Drood, pay such deference to the opinions of one whom every intelligent person who is present

secretly loves her; and this betrays him into the quarrel with Edwin Drood, which fixes on him the suspicion of being Edwin's murderer. Meanwhile her own giddy, guileless, affectionate heart is untouched by passion, until she meets the brave naval officer who is to be her future husband. As she walks with him, she thinks that "his far-seeing blue eyes looked as if they had been used to watch danger afar off, and to watch it, without flinching, drawing nearer and nearer. When, happening to raise her own eyes, she found that he seemed to be thinking something about them."

This is the dawn of a passion, the progress of which we can only conjecture; and we leave Rosa, as we leave the rest of the characters, at the point when she promises to gain more and more on our interest.

THE END

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